



Recruiting Volunteers for the Emergency Services

A recruitment resource for
Brigades, Groups and Units.

Strategic Volunteers and Youth Programs

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Resource development

This guide is built on current evidence-based good practice in volunteer recruitment, as well as extensive consultation including:

- discussions with DFES and local government staff who support volunteer brigade, group and unit (BGU) leaders across regions;
- discussions with the five WA Volunteer Emergency Services Associations;
- input from volunteers throughout WA through 16 interviews and 38 submissions on the innovation platform;
- responses to past survey data and over 70 past interviews collected from emergency services volunteers in WA; and
- current and past recruitment resources developed and used by the volunteer emergency services in WA.

Author Note - This resource is a result of a collaboration between researchers working at Curtin University's Future of Work Institute and the University of Western Australia and employees and volunteers at the Department of Fire and Emergency. This document was written by Djurre Holtrop, Serena Wee, Mahesh Shankaralingam, Courtenay McGill, Patrick Dunlop, Jennifer Pidgeon, and Kate White.

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About this guide

Recruiting new volunteers is an important way to ensure that your BGU has the strength and skills to support the community and remain viable. Recruitment achieves more than just getting volunteers in the door. A successful recruitment process will also:

- attract members from all parts of the community;
- increase the visibility of your BGU to your entire community; and
- improve the performance of your BGU by connecting you with people who have valuable skills.

Implementing an effective recruitment process can be challenging. The aim of this guide is to provide practical guidance based on a combination of evidence-based good practice and recruitment strategies that are being successfully used across all the volunteer emergency services.

The recruitment process

The process of bringing new volunteers into your BGU can be split into five stages. Plan, Promote, Select, Connect and Retain.

This guide outlines the first three stages: Plan, Promote, and Select.

Once volunteers are selected and invited to join, the next steps are to Connect and Retain them. For guidance on these two parts of the process, see the resources Supporting New Volunteers and Managing Volunteers in The Emergency Services.



1. Plan



Making your BGU appealing to volunteers

Why should you make your BGU appealing to volunteers?

The more appealing if your BGU appears as a volunteering experience, the more likely it is that people will want to volunteer with you. The image your BGU projects to the community plays an important role in influencing the choice people make to volunteer with you.

Ways to make your BGU appealing

There lots of things you can do to make your BGU an attractive place to volunteer. Start with the following three ideas:

Promote Inclusivity	<p>Everyone wants to feel like they belong, and this is especially important for volunteers. Here are a few ways you can do this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☀ Include everyone in social events, making sure no one is left out.☀ Involve volunteers in decision making.☀ Actively reach out to members from all parts of the community.☀ Develop a range of volunteer support roles that enable everyone from the community to connect with you and be involved (eg. social media, community engagement, fundraising, school-aged education).☀ Always be welcoming and have fun.
Recognise Existing Members	<p>Volunteers don't volunteer to be recognised. However, it is nice for potential volunteers and existing ones to see that their efforts are noticed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☀ Always say THANK YOU.☀ Recognise milestones – include small gestures such as recognising member achievements on your BGUs social media page or large gestures at celebratory events.☀ Always be welcoming and have fun.
Address Misconceptions	<p><i>"All volunteers need to be able bodied and ready to do everything"</i></p> <p><i>"The BGU only wants members who can respond to every emergency"</i></p> <p><i>"BGU members get paid for their service"</i></p> <p>Misconceptions about emergency services volunteering, like these, can hinder your recruitment efforts. When promoting volunteering opportunities and interacting with the community it is important to identify and address these misconceptions in a friendly and helpful way.</p>

Preparing volunteer role descriptions

Why are role descriptions important?

Clear and accurate role descriptions give potential volunteers an understanding of:

- the purpose and activities at your BGU;
- expectations of volunteers, like time and training commitments;
- the skills and attributes required for the role; and
- the benefits of volunteering with your BGU.

Preparing good role descriptions

Role descriptions should be tailored to different roles. There are four essential elements to have in a good volunteer role description:

Promote Inclusivity	Many people volunteer because they want to serve the community and be part of something bigger than themselves. Include a short overview of the role, how it fits into the service's mission and how it makes a difference. Potential volunteers will be able to see what they are joining and how it aligns with their personal values.
List of tasks and responsibilities	Provide a list of the main activities and responsibilities that make up volunteering roles in your BGU. This will help potential volunteers gain a good understanding of what volunteering in the emergency services involves.
Volunteer requirements	You don't just want more people in the door – you want the right people. Communicating clearly what it is that you are looking for in a volunteer helps attract the right people to the role. This could include; availability, physical capabilities, required commitment, particular skillsets and attributes such as a willingness to learn and the ability to work in a team.
Benefits for volunteers	There are a lot of benefits that people can enjoy from volunteering with the emergency services, including meeting new people and developing new skills. Highlighting these benefits in a role description means that potential volunteers know what they can expect to get out of their experience with you.

Tip

The volunteering experience is different for everyone, use this opportunity to check with existing members whether the role description accurately captures how they benefit from volunteering with your BGU and confirm and update the list of skills and tasks. To develop Volunteer Role Descriptions refer to the service specific templates available in the recruitment toolbox.



Targeting your recruitment

Why should you target recruitment?

While generic recruitment campaigns can make more people aware of your BGU, recruiting becomes more effective when it speaks directly to the type of people you are hoping to recruit. Targeted recruitment, as opposed to generic recruitment, allows you to:

- target the people in your community with the skills and attributes ready to contribute to your BGU;
- attract people who want to use their skills and attributes to support the community; and
- simplify the recruitment process.

Identifying who to target and why

Asking the following questions will help you to identify your target group:

What skills does your BGU need?

Think broadly consider skills like mechanical, computer, gardening, teaching, admin, social media etc...

Who has these skills?

Target groups of people who are likely to have the skills you need (e.g. the software developer for people with computer skills, or the Mother's Club for people who are adept at social media).

What can your BGU offer that will appeal to people with these skills?

For example, someone with computer skills maybe interested in getting experience offering technical support, whereas someone with teaching skills might be more interested in the potential to help with training.

What commitment do you need from volunteers?

Reflect on overall hours and potential shifts. Do you need someone who can be on a roster, can they do their work on weekends or weekdays, do they need to be able to volunteer any time of the day or can they volunteer during business hours? Clearly state this requirement and target groups accordingly.

Do you want volunteers similar to those you already have or do you need more variety?

Do you want more of the same or a wider variety of people? Consider what is it that these volunteers have in common or what differences you're seeking. Think about where you would find them?

How large is your target group and can you be flexible to broaden the group?

Remember even the best recruitment efforts will only attract a proportion of the group you are targeting.

If your target group is small, can you broaden it? For example, can you include FIFO workers or people who cannot volunteer on Sundays or Fridays.

Learning from the past

What can you learn from past recruitment efforts?

Reflect on what has worked well and what didn't and use this information to constantly improve your recruitment activities.

An example

As part of the annual recruitment plan the local BGU ran two open days during the year. Both were well attended but the second event resulted in a greater number of potential volunteers. People who were taking the next step toward joining the BGU.

When the team reflected on both events, and talking with the potential volunteers, one thing stood out, the way information was shared with potential volunteers prior to the event.

The first event used simple advertising, letting people know about the time and place using the local paper, social media and posters. The second event did the same thing but also gave specific information about the volunteering opportunities, the commitment required and roles available.

The existing volunteers were encouraged to talk about their experience joining and volunteering with the BGU, talking with people in their social media communities and answering questions as they came through.

The prospective volunteers said that the clearly defined roles and open conversations about the experience of volunteering with the BGU encouraged them to attend the open day. Meeting the existing volunteers in person and seeing that they were a genuine and welcoming group helped them make the final decision to take the steps toward joining.

The BGU learned to increase the effectiveness of an open day they should:

- ☼ Be clear about the volunteering opportunities in all of their advertising.
- ☼ Use online communities to share volunteering experiences and answer questions leading up to the event.
- ☼ Reinforce those messages at the open day to help people to take the final step to commit.

Tools and techniques for reviewing past recruitment efforts

The following tools and techniques can be used as a starting point for looking at what has and hasn't worked for your BGU in the past:

Conduct intake interviews or surveys	When a new volunteer joins your BGU, take some time to find out how they heard about the opportunity and what it was that attracted them to it. You can either do this in an informal interview or by using a short intake survey.
Ask members of the community	Ask your community stakeholders, local council, other clubs or groups, businesses and individuals for their opinions about your recruitment efforts. What did they think was effective? What didn't appeal to them? Do they have new ideas for you?
Review the data	Measure the effectiveness of your media promotions by getting reports on the number of people reached and who and how many engaged with your media. If one social media post reached 100 people and another reached 10, you know which one to use again next time.

Planning the recruitment process

Why is it important to plan recruitment?

Before you start recruiting, it is important to come up with a plan of attack. This will help you allocate your time and resources more efficiently, make your recruitment effective, and ensure that your BGU looks as appealing as possible.

Useful planning steps

Steps currently used by BGUs that recruit successfully include:

Assign responsibility for communication	<p>Potential volunteers can have a lot of questions and may be unsure who to approach for answers.</p> <p>Allocate current volunteers to be responsible for answering any questions that potential volunteers might have about volunteering with your BGU - this can be done in different forums including on social media.</p>
Decide what information to use in your messaging	<p>Create some consistent messaging about your volunteering opportunities that all volunteers can share in the community.</p> <p>This ensures all current members know what to tell interested people about volunteering at your BGU and that all of the information is consistent.</p>
Develop a brand for your BGU and use it consistently	<p>Consistent branding helps your BGU stand out - ensure your flyers, website, t-shirts, social media and email signatures have the same up to date branding.</p> <p>Dedicate time to this early on to give your BGU an instantly recognisable image in the community.</p>
Follow up on expressions of interest	<p>Someone's interested, now what? When someone expresses interest in your BGU you must follow up in a timely and appropriate way.</p> <p>Before starting recruitment decide how you are going to deal with expressions of interest. Options include inviting them to a training night? Asking them to fill out an application form? Conducting an interview? Or something else?</p>

2. Promote



Developing a recruitment message

Why develop a recruitment message or pitch?

Recruitment is essentially an advertisement for a product - your BGU. Having an effective sales pitch or message for volunteering at your BGU allows it to stand out to the people you are trying to recruit.

Developing an effective recruitment message

Effective recruitment messages are short, sharp and clear. They are a succinct and persuasive way to advertise your volunteering role/s. When developing a message, it is important to align it to the role description/s you have developed. For example, including a statement like seeking someone for a physically active role may be misleading if a significant part of the role is administrative.

While recruitment messages can vary, try to keep these core elements in mind:

Communicate your purpose	<p>The main purpose of your BGU should always be clearly communicated through your messaging. This helps anyone looking at your message/advertisement to immediately understand what you do and whether it appeals to them.</p> <p>Eg. "Working with the community to keep everyone safe"</p>
Pictures speak 1000 words	<p>Pictures are a great way to communicate what your BGU does. For the best use of images remember to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ensure they don't only display volunteers in the thick of the action. Only showing action from callouts will create inaccurate expectations.2. Use pictures that reflect the makeup of your community and your targeted audience. People are more likely to sign up if they believe that someone like them can be part of your group. Try to include a mix of genders, ages and ethnic backgrounds in any pictures.
Focus on the positive and avoid sounding desperate	<p>Focus your message on the benefits of volunteering, both for the volunteer and the community.</p> <p>Recruitment pitches that focus on the negative consequences of not getting enough volunteers tend to attract more short-term recruits.</p> <p>Develop your pitch with your target audience in mind, those types of people you have identified as a good match for your BGU – with the skills and attributes required.</p>



Choosing recruitment channels

What are recruitment channels?

Recruitment channels are the different places that you can advertise and promote volunteering opportunities and raise the profile of your BGU. Examples of recruitment channels include:

- ✿ traditional media (newspapers, television and radio);
- ✿ social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram);
- ✿ community events and open days;
- ✿ word of mouth; and
- ✿ volunteer job boards including the Emergency Volunteer Recruitment website.

Why should you choose specific channels?

Certain channels are more effective than others for reaching particular types of people. Selecting the most appropriate channels will help you tailor your recruitment message to your community or target group in an effective and efficient way.

At the same time, using only one channel limits your audience. It is beneficial to use a combination of different channels if you are trying to broaden your target group, reach a more diverse demographic, or reach people you haven't reached before.

Choosing the best recruitment channels for your BGU

The channels best suited for your recruitment effort depends largely on the people you intend to recruit. Ideally, you want to choose channels that allow you to speak directly to your intended audience.

For more information on the differences between recruitment channels and how to choose the most appropriate one for you, see the Recruitment Channels tip sheet.

Going beyond short-term recruitment

Recruitment channels can also be used on an ongoing basis to raise the profile of your BGU in the community, which can be beneficial to recruitment in the long term. The Volunteer recruitment website, community events and social media are particularly effective for this.

3. Select



The selection process

What is selection and why is it important?

Selection involves choosing the right person for the role. Just as in paid workforce, choosing the wrong people to join your BGU can be costly. A significant amount of time, effort, and money goes into training new emergency services volunteers. You want to do everything you can to make sure you have the right people learning those skills and to make sure they stay with your BGU for as long as possible.

It can be tempting sometimes to just get more people in the door, but if a new volunteer leaves after six months of training or is disruptive to BGU functioning, having those extra numbers isn't really helping you at all.

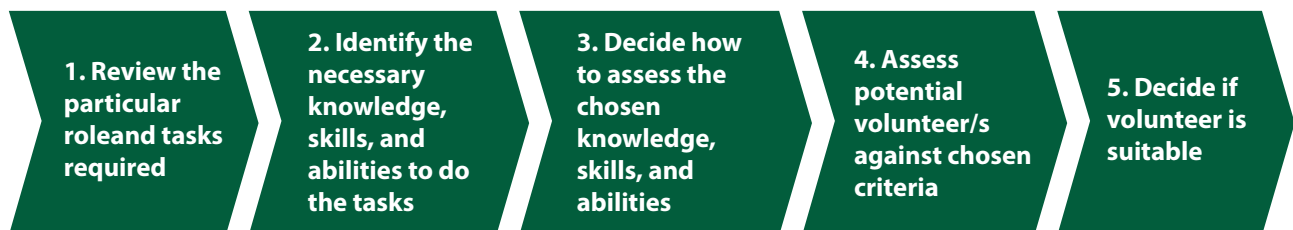
Setting clear expectations

Having a good selection process not only helps you to make sure that new volunteers are a good fit with the BGU – it also gives volunteers realistic expectations about volunteering with you. When new volunteers have expectations that don't match their experience, they are much more likely to quit, so shaping accurate expectations upfront can be useful to improve retention and give people a chance to opt out if the role isn't right for them.

For more information on how to use selection to set clear expectations, see the Setting Expectations tip sheet.

The selection process

The selection process can be split into five stages:



For more information on each step, see the Selection Process tip sheet

Selection tools

There are a number of different tools that you can use to assess someone's suitability for a volunteer role. Using the following tools in combination will give you a full picture of an applicant's suitability.

Work sample and skill tests

Work samples require a potential volunteer to perform a task or activity similar to what they will do in their role. Skill tests assess particular skills that a volunteer needs.

These are a good way to see how someone works and can be particularly useful for testing physical requirements (e.g. lifting or driving). You can also test soft skills such as teamwork. Work samples have the added benefit of giving the potential volunteer a taste for the type of work they will be doing at your BGU.

When using these tests, make sure they are relevant to the type of work the volunteer will actually have to do and use the same test/criteria for all applicants.

Interview

Interviews allow you to assess the volunteer against the characteristics you chose for the role while giving you an idea about their basic personality, social skills, and how well they fit your BGU.

As well as being a good tool for determining suitability, interviews provide a great opportunity to clarify a potential volunteer's expectations about volunteering.

For more information and tips on conducting interviews, see the Interviewing Volunteers tip sheet.

Reference checks

Checking work and personal references can be a good way to both confirm things that the applicant said in their interview and to identify any red flags early on.

These should not be your only selection tool.

As part of John's selection process he was asked to join the BGU for a training session. It included a practice drill that gave him an opportunity to demonstrate that he could safely drive the truck, follow instructions, and work effectively with the team

Before joining the BGU, Jane had an interview with James. He let her know about the different roles and expectations of volunteers. Then he asked why she wanted to volunteer, and about her previous experience working in teams and dealing with emergency situations.

Jack called Mary's current employer for a reference before signing her up. Mary's boss told him that she was great at taking initiative, confirming Jack's own impressions from the interview.

Resume/CV

Looking at a potential volunteer's resume can give you an idea about any unique or important skills they can contribute to the BGU and highlight any necessary qualifications for the role.

- E.g. mechanical abilities/qualifications, accounting experience, computer skills, truck license, skipper's ticket

At the same time, a resume can help you to identify gaps to ask about in an interview or areas where the volunteer may need training or support.

These should not be your only selection tool.

Social media checks

Looking at someone's social media page can be helpful for identifying potential 'red flags' and unprofessional behaviour, but remember that any interpretation is going to be highly subjective and potentially missing important context.

Use with caution.

Bob's CV showed that he had several years' experience working in event management. The leadership team asked if he would like to put those skills to use in promoting the BGU through community engagement events.

As a final check, Sarah had a look at Greg's Facebook page. She saw that it was full of inflammatory posts about minority groups. She thought this could result in a bad fit with their BGU given the amount of outreach work they do in a very diverse community. Sarah decided to call Greg to have a conversation about what she found.

Tip

When deciding which tool/s to use, look first at what it is that you want to assess.

For example, would you assess someone's ability to drive with an interview or a work sample test? Would you get information about their personality fit from a resume or interview?



**CULTURAL
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