

# SUPPORTING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

HOW VOLUNTEER MANAGERS CAN WELCOME AND  
INTEGRATE NEW VOLUNTEERS



An informational booklet produced by  
Southern Volunteering (SA) Inc



Southern Volunteering (SA) Inc  
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# INTRODUCTION

Beginning a new volunteer role can be daunting. Some volunteers may find it difficult to source, join, and feel comfortable in a volunteer program without some assistance.

Joining a volunteer program is a lot like joining any new social group. By viewing the volunteer on-boarding process from the perspective of socialisation, Volunteer Managers can better facilitate volunteer integration.

This booklet will explore the 5 stages of the process of socialisation, and how Volunteer Managers can help at each stage to ensure new volunteers have a positive experience.



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# THE SOCIALISATION PROCESS

Socialisation is a process through which a new social connection is established. It is when a person transitions from not being connected to another person or group; to them feeling accepted, comfortable, and like they belong.

This process is important for Volunteer Managers to understand. When a new volunteer joins a program, part of your role is to act as a social connector. You can help the new volunteer become an integrated member of the group by creating an environment in which they can comfortably navigate the socialisation process.

## STAGES OF SOCIALISATION



This model outlines the 5 stages of the socialisation process, and how an individual may become a member of a new group. By understanding the role that Volunteer Managers play at each stage of this process, you can help your new volunteers to feel welcome, settled, and like an equally valuable member of the volunteer group.

This model of socialisation was produced by J Farmer, T De Cotta, C Hartung, J Knox, C Rowe & C Stenta of the Social Innovation Research Institute 2021. The full report *Social Connection 101* is available at:

<https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2021-12/apo-nid314766.pdf>

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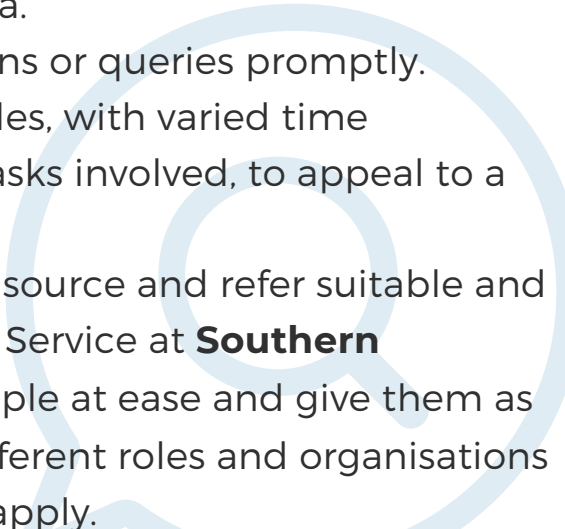
# 1. SEEKING GROUP

In terms of volunteer engagement, the "seeking group" stage refers to when someone becomes interested in volunteering, and they start to look for a suitable role or program. As a Volunteer Manager, you can assist at this stage by making volunteer roles accessible, appealing, and approachable.

When advertising a volunteer position, consider things like:

- Using language that is easy to understand, friendly and enthusiastic.
- Providing clear details of what tasks a role will involve, and whether adaptations can be made to suit the volunteer's abilities.
- Including information about your organisation, such as its services, purpose, location, and structure.
- Emphasising that new volunteers are welcome and appreciated.

Also consider:

- Ensuring that information about how to become a volunteer is easy to find on your website and social media.
  - Responding to any volunteer applications or queries promptly.
  - Creating a diverse range of volunteer roles, with varied time commitments, levels of difficulty, and tasks involved, to appeal to a broad range of potential volunteers.
  - Utilising Volunteer Resource Centres to source and refer suitable and keen volunteers. Our Volunteer Referral Service at **Southern Volunteering (SA) Inc**, aims to put people at ease and give them as much information as possible about different roles and organisations before they select an organisation and apply.
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## 2. JOINING GROUP

This stage is when a volunteer first visits your organisation and is introduced to the volunteer program. As a Volunteer Manager, you can assist at this stage by creating a welcoming and approachable environment.

When a new volunteer first arrives, consider things like:

- Making sure someone (either yourself or a designated staff member or volunteer) is the official "welcomer" to any new volunteers. This person is tasked with greeting the new volunteer when they arrive, showing them around the facilities, introducing them to other staff and volunteers, and answering any initial questions.
- Encouraging existing staff and volunteers to include the new volunteer, get to know them, and show them how to do things.
- Creating a relaxed, friendly and welcoming volunteering setting where people feel at ease. This may include creating spaces where conversations can begin easily, such as a tea and coffee station.
- Providing a welcome pack to new volunteers, this might include a position description, an outline of their role, tasks and expectations, any policies or procedures relevant to volunteers, and the latest annual reports and strategic plans.
- Making sure the new volunteer knows how the organisation works, and how their volunteer role is a valuable part of the organisation's service provision.



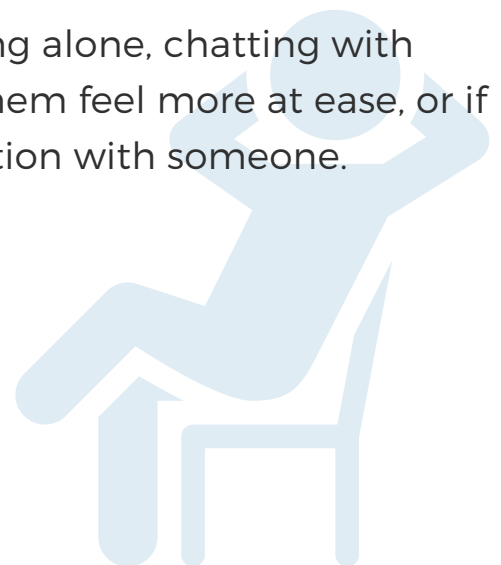
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## 3. GETTING COMFORTABLE

This stage is when a volunteer begins to attend their program a bit more regularly. As a Volunteer Manager, you can assist at this stage by helping them feel included, comfortable and capable.

As your volunteer becomes more comfortable, consider things like:

- Having another volunteer act as a buddy for the first few visits.
- Encouraging the volunteer to ask any questions and let you know if they need additional help.
- Giving them clear tasks and objectives. People find it easier to socialise if the focus is shifted on completing a task or solving a problem. Help volunteers feel comfortable by getting them to work on a project collaboratively with other volunteers or staff.
- Asking them if they are happy with all aspects of their role. Consider making adjustments to the expectations of their role if necessary, e.g. letting the volunteer to focus on the tasks they find most enjoyable or allowing them to volunteer for shorter time periods.
- Giving time and support for the volunteer while they're learning how their role and the organisation works, reassure them that it's okay if they make a mistake.
- If you see a volunteer withdrawing or standing alone, chatting with them and seeing if there's any way to help them feel more at ease, or if they need you to help them start a conversation with someone.



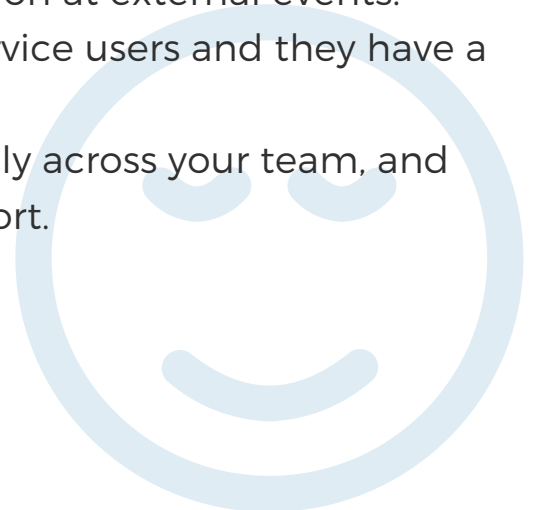
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## 4. EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

This stage is when a volunteer has decided they are enjoying the program, and want to commit to regular involvement. As a Volunteer Manager, you can assist at this stage by making sure they feel appreciated, included, and that they continue to have a positive experience.

As a volunteer begins attending regularly, consider things like:

- Getting to know the volunteer better, asking about their interests and hobbies. Build a rapport with them to ensure they have an enjoyable experience when they come to volunteer.
- Checking in regularly with all volunteers, see how they're doing and ask whether their volunteer experience could be improved in any way. This may be done formally via scheduled catch-up sessions, or informally via an in-person chat, phone call, text or email.
- Thanking your volunteers. Whether it's at the end of a shift, or in the monthly newsletter, make sure to tell them that they are valued and that their contribution makes an impact.
- Avoiding creating a divide between staff and volunteers. Invite volunteers to meetings, planning days, functions, training opportunities or to represent the organisation at external events. Volunteers often interact with clients or service users and they have a wealth of valuable information.
- Making sure volunteers are treated equitably across your team, and that they all have access to the same support.





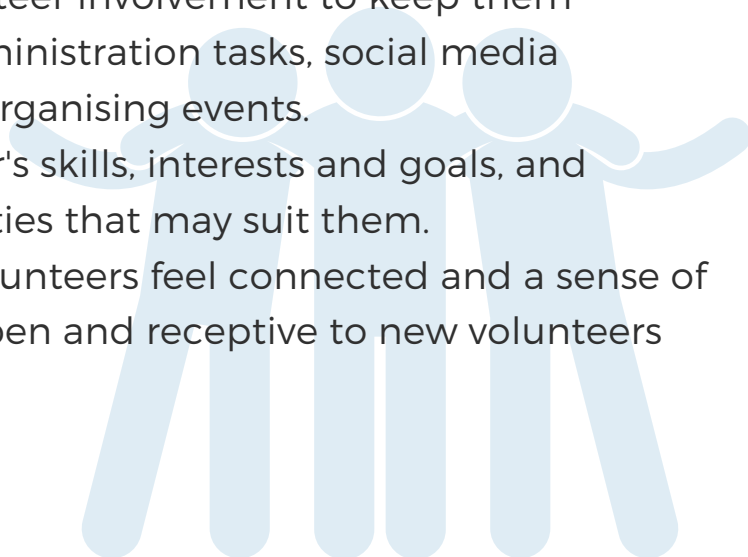
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## 5. BELONGING

This stage is when a volunteer is fully integrated as a welcome and regular member of the group, and they really feel like they belong. As a Volunteer Manager, you can assist at this stage by offering on-going acknowledgement and support, and being receptive to feedback.

Once your volunteer feels like they belong, consider things like:

- Offering formal recognition to volunteers, such as; certificates, awards, volunteer social events, or recognition events.
- Including the impact of volunteers in the organisation's documents such as newsletters and annual reports, listing the volunteer's names (with permission) where relevant.
- Allowing volunteers to pursue leadership opportunities within the program if possible. This might involve helping them to coordinate a group of volunteers, acting as a welcomer or buddy to new volunteers, or providing opportunities for public speaking.
- Including volunteers in any evaluations or reflections. Invite them to contribute to discussions and decisions about changes or improvements to the program.
- Finding new avenues for volunteer involvement to keep them engaged, this may include administration tasks, social media management, fundraising, or organising events.
- Getting to know your volunteer's skills, interests and goals, and offering them other opportunities that may suit them.
- Ensuring that while current volunteers feel connected and a sense of belonging, that they are still open and receptive to new volunteers joining in.



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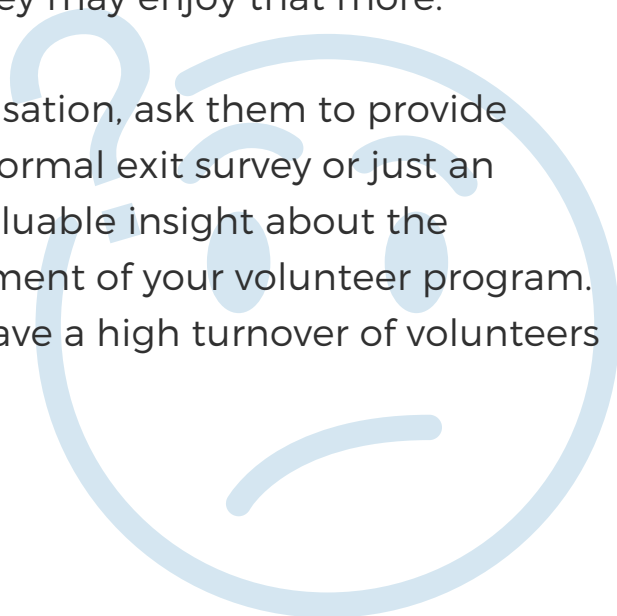
## IF IT'S NOT WORKING

A key aspect of the socialisation process is that not every person will find their fit in every group. You may find that even if you utilise many of the strategies outlined in this booklet, that a volunteer simply doesn't find their place in your program.

If this occurs, consider:

- Asking the volunteer whether there's any ways in which they could find the program more enjoyable. You may be able to make reasonable adjustments to their role, their schedule, the facilities, or the program: to help them feel more comfortable.
- If your program isn't the right fit, see if there are other ways they could volunteer within your organisations. Explore other roles, tasks or programs that they may be able to become involved in.
- Ensure that volunteers feel comfortable discussing their enjoyment of the program with you. Emphasise that while you value their contributions and would love them to remain involved, that it is their free time that they're donating, and that they are welcome to pursue other opportunities if they feel that they may enjoy that more.

If a volunteer decides to leave your organisation, ask them to provide feedback. This might be in the form of a formal exit survey or just an informal chat. You may be able to gain valuable insight about the strengths and potential areas of improvement of your volunteer program. This is particularly useful if you find you have a high turnover of volunteers or low retention rates.



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## SUMMARY

By understanding these stages of socialisation, how they relate to volunteering, and what you can do to help; you can help to facilitate more positive volunteering experiences.

While people volunteer for a multitude of reasons, one of the most common motivations to volunteer is for enjoyment and to gain social connections. By creating a welcoming, supportive and fun volunteering environment, you can help your volunteers to gain these benefits from your program. This is likely to lead to on-going or recurring engagement.

If you have any further queries about volunteer management, please feel free to contact the team at Southern Volunteering (SA) Inc. We understand the important role that Volunteer Managers have, and we are happy to provide assistance to help your programs to be successful.



**Southern Volunteering (SA) Inc  
extends a special thanks to:**

Jane Farmer, Tracy De Cotta, Catherine Hartung, Jasmine Knox, Callan Rowe & Christian Stenta of the Social Innovation Research Institute for their work developing this model of socialisation.

Their report *Social Connection 101*,  
is available at:

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