

4 steps to working with volunteers

Volunteers are your school canteen's most precious resource and can help you run a successful business.

When you are working with volunteers remember:

- It needs to be meaningful. People want to feel as though the hours they contribute are important
- There needs to be a benefit. Recognise what motivates that person to volunteer and harness that e.g. a desire to help others; personal skills; family connection
- To specify upfront if and how the volunteer will be reimbursed for any out of pocket expenses.
- To provide a written job description for all volunteers detailing:
 - roles and responsibilities, including what to wear
 - purpose
 - location time commitment
 - contact details for who they report to
 - skills and experience required.

There are 4 steps to working with volunteers, they are called the 4 R's – Recruit; Roster and welcome; Retain; and Reward.

1. RECRUIT

When recruiting volunteers keep in mind the different social, ethnic and educational backgrounds of your school community. Not everyone who volunteers are going to be able or willing to carry out every task. Try to achieve a good mix of volunteers and a wide range of jobs.



Parents and carers, grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends are potential volunteers. In addition, try looking outside your school community e.g. senior citizens who live in the local area may be willing to help. Some local councils also operating 'volunteer resource centres' – part of their role is to match willing volunteers with suitable opportunities.

Note: Paid and volunteers canteen staff may be required to have a Working with Children's Check/Working with Vulnerable People Check. You must investigate the rules and regulations specific to your State/Territory.

Recruitment methods

- Advertisement in the school newsletter, website, Facebook page, or if you use online ordering pop a notice on this page too
- Send an invitation to parents along with the menu, encouraging them to visit the canteen and volunteer
- Attend kindergarten orientations, parent meetings and assemblies to engage with parents
- Ask existing volunteers if they know someone who is looking for something to do!

Testimonial - Cre Millar, Canteen Supervisor, Applecross Senior High School

I have been using the Melville Volunteer Resource Centre (MVRC) for around four years and I have found it invaluable and so easy! All of our MVRC volleys are fantastic and have more availability than most of our parent community. I think this is due in part to many of them being retired or past the stage of having young children to care for. They are particularly vibrant, lively people with a thirst for keeping active and we have found them all to be a fantastic addition to our volunteer list. I recommend calling your local volunteer resource centre immediately as it really is so simple for such an enormous benefit. The MVRC volleys have kept us going on more than one occasion!

2. ROSTER AND WELCOME

Once you have a list of volunteers ask them to complete an availability roster that includes time and days they are free as well as contact details. The volunteer roster should be sent out to all volunteers so that if they cannot make it on their rostered day they can then call on someone to fill in for them.

Rostering tips:

- Make sure you do not have all new volunteers on the same day
- Implement a buddy system and roster new volunteers with experienced volunteers
- Offer different times to volunteer, such as a morning or lunch shift so that people know they are not obliged to stay the whole day.

Welcoming volunteers means you need to make it easy for them to volunteer, feel comfortable and confident and provide on the job training. First impressions count! The best way is to welcome new volunteers is to develop a 'welcome kit'.

Tip: the WA School Canteen Association Inc. have a volunteer welcome kit on their website that can be edited to suit your school.

Any job is easier if you have clear instructions and basic training. For example:

- Complete Food safety and hygiene training
- Recipe cards not only ensure that every item is made the same but leaves no room for interpretation, include the recipe and an image of the finished product
- Some volunteers prefer to stay behind the scene and not interact with money or children, try to create a space that has a variety of tasks that suit all levels.

3. RETAIN

Once you have your volunteers now you need to keep them. Volunteers will stay if they have a strong sense of purpose. Some tips for retaining volunteers:

- Be a good role model. Don't ask volunteers to do a job that you wouldn't do yourself
- Be friendly yet professional
- Encourage mutual respect and sharing of stories but not gossiping
- Keep each volunteer's responsibilities to a minimum, particularly during the first few times they work in the canteen
- Roster parents together whose children share classes – they will immediately have a common interest
- Let them know, and remind them, that their commitment is flexible. Experienced canteen supervisors will tell you that this is particularly important. It may not necessarily be convenient for you when trying to manage staffing rosters, but there is no better way to lose a volunteer than to make them feel that they are obliged to commit to a strict roster
- Remember their individual stories. Nothing makes a person feel more welcome than knowing that you think they are important as a person, not just for what they bring to the workplace
- Have a 'get to know you' morning tea early in the year for all the canteen workers, including volunteers and if applicable the canteen committee. Many parents may already know each other. This is a great opportunity for them to network.

4. REWARD

Show your volunteers that they are valued, genuinely praise and thank them. Check with your school principal and/or canteen committee about options (and rules) for rewarding volunteers.

Some simple ideas for rewarding volunteers include:

- Encourage the Principal to call into the canteen to say hello and thank the volunteers every now and then
- Add the name of the volunteers into the school newsletter the week after as a note of thanks
- Provide each volunteer with a voucher for the canteen to be used by the student or parent, don't forget to include this cost as an overhead
- Hold a special end of year thank you lunch
- Provide each volunteer with a certificate of appreciation.

