



# Engaging with Gen Y Volunteers

As a proud Gen Yer, I often get frustrated by organisations who say they want to attract my generation as volunteers, but then do very little to learn about how we tick. I start out excited to be involved, but often end up feeling like an inconvenience or an after-thought. I know that Gen Yers need to be flexible in how we communicate and engage, but if you want us on the team, you need to meet us half-way. Here are my top tips for engaging with your Gen Y volunteers.

### 1. Respond to our why questions positively.

It may seem like we're constantly in your ear, but we genuinely want to know why things are done the way they are. The more we ask, the more we learn. We are not trying to undermine you or argue with you, we're just trying to understand why things work the way they do. Take time to summarise your reasoning. We would not have asked if we weren't serious about getting an answer.

### 2. Don't assume, anything.

Just like we constantly ask you questions, please ask us questions as well. Get to know who we are and why we want to be involved with you. Don't assume we're there for the same reason as your other volunteers, even if those volunteers are Gen Y as well. We want you to know us personally.

### 3. Keep your communication brief but informative.

Whether we admit it or not, our attention spans are getting shorter by the day. We want information summarised, easily accessible and quick to digest. If you give us pages of information, don't expect us to read every word. Tell us what you want to tell us, but don't add anything to fluff it up. Short Facebook posts or videos, a quick email newsletter or a snapshot of progress will get your message across. If we want to know more, we will ask.

### 4. Embrace technology.

You can't escape it, so don't even try. Embrace it, engage with it and learn about it. We use it constantly, so if you want to be able to communicate with us effectively, you'll need to learn how to use it too. 90% of my generation check their emails, texts and social media streams before they even get out of bed. So while you are writing out your short, informative update think about how you are going to get it to us. If you don't know how, take advantage of the skill set you have at your disposal and ask a Gen Y volunteer to help you with your communication strategy.

### 5. Listen to us and value our ideas.

Despite what you may think, we actually have some pretty good ideas. We may well challenge your approach or the way your organisation has done something since the beginning, but try to have an open mind. Sometimes we know things that you don't, simply because we were taught a different way or exposed to different things. We don't want to undermine you or take over your organisation, we are simply passionate about your cause and want to contribute to your growth.

### 6. Seek out opportunities to involve us.

We get really discouraged when we give up our time to contribute in an organisation, and we get treated like we have no skills. We are individuals with distinct abilities, personalities and passions. Don't go through your check list and simply give us the jobs that seem easy. Take the time to find our fit and think about how our strengths could help your organisation. We are team players, but we don't want to feel useless or like volunteering is a waste of time. We need a purpose, a cause and a direction or our passion will fade.

### 7. Trust us.

I was raised with Mum saying 'We trust you implicitly until you give us a reason not to', and I expect that from any organisation I work for as well. Trust us until we break your trust. Don't start out on the edge, jump right in and give us the benefit of the doubt. We actually know what we are doing. Encourage us, give us advice and feedback, but don't do it for us. Be willing to release your grip and delegate completely. We will step up to the challenge.

### 8. Be flexible.

Most of us are juggling tertiary study with part-time jobs, neither of which have a standard timetable so you're going to have to be flexible with the hours you want us to help out. Telling us we have to volunteer on the same day at the same time, every week, is probably not going to work. Our study timetable changes and our work rosters rotate. Like it or not, these aspects of our lives will always have priority over volunteering, so you'll have to be flexible or lose us altogether.

Gen Y have a lot to offer organisations, you just need to take time to get to know us and ensure a good fit.



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Courtney is a proud Gen Yer, currently studying towards her Bachelor of Education and actively volunteering for several community groups. She is passionate about encouraging her peers to get involved with volunteering, but is frustrated by the lack of organisations prepared to accommodate the needs of Gen Y volunteers.

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