

Volunteers – the heartbeat of sports clubs

“For many New Zealand organisations, the involvement of volunteers makes the difference between being able to achieve their mission and objectives, and not achieving them. Volunteers, therefore, are a precious resource. Behind every great volunteer programme, there is someone who makes sure the right people are in the right roles, doing the right thing, at the right time”.

[Volunteer NZ](#)

A common challenge facing sports clubs today is ensuring there are enough willing and able volunteers to resource the many aspects of what it takes for the club to be successful. All too often when someone steps down from a volunteer portfolio or committee, there is no-one ‘camera ready’ to replace them, and existing volunteers or committee members are left to pick up the extra work. To make things more complicated, often there is no position description or plan of what the person contributed from their role apart from what’s in their head.

This can lead to a small group of people responsible for a large amount of work and trying to make sense of what’s needed.

Volunteers are the life blood of our clubs, but it seems to be harder to recruit them on to our committees.

Successful clubs know what their purpose is, where they want to go and how they are going to get there. This happens by having a **strategic plan** which aligns and guides the development of the club over a period of time. Yet having a plan is only part of the picture; understanding the **roles and responsibilities** required to deliver on the plan is vital to the success of the club.

Many clubs are now appointing a volunteer coordinator to reflect the importance of volunteers and the value that they offer. The thinking is that if clubs take a similar approach to volunteers as they do with the playing membership they will see more people supporting their club in a volunteer capacity. With members we recruit, develop, communicate, reward and create a club culture they want to be part of. A similar planned approach is needed with volunteers to support clubs to work efficiently and effectively.

At your next committee meeting, schedule some time to explore your approach to volunteers. Here’s some questions to guide your thinking:

- What’s our practice of saying thank you to the volunteers who offer their time, commitment and capability to our Club?
- Who acts as our volunteer coordinator or key contact for volunteers in our club – do we do enough to provide volunteer support, communication and planning?
- How clear are we about the different volunteer portfolios or roles we have in our club – do we do enough to make the roles and responsibilities clear to our volunteers?
- Are we thinking enough about succession – ensuring that we have someone learning each of the critical volunteer portfolios, so they can step in and step up when needed?
- Thinking about our current volunteers and the roles or portfolio’s they hold, have we got any critical risks, or points of single point sensitivity or overload. What might we do about this...

- How do we benefit from the voice of volunteers in our club – what input and feedback loops have do we have available?

Having a planned, coordinated approach in managing your volunteers makes it easier to acknowledge and reward their efforts. Research has identified four core values associated with volunteering in sport and recreation: generosity; love of sport; social connection; and appreciation. Many volunteers do not want direct recognition for their volunteering efforts, but do want to feel good about giving up their time.

The Lotto Volunteer Foundation and Sport NZ have teamed up to support and celebrate the sport volunteers in our community who make sport happen. You can show your appreciation for their wonderful contribution by sending them a [thank you e-card](#). The e-card also gives them the chance to enter into a draw to win \$500 worth of quality sporting goods including clothing, cones, bibs, balls and more.

“Having a lot of people doing a little makes a big difference”

For more resources and information see:



[Committees, roles and meetings](#) – Information for clubs on management, committees and effective meetings.



[Finding and Keeping Volunteers](#) –Research based information to help organisations develop better volunteer management practices.



[Volunteers in Community Organisations](#) – Information, resources and opportunities to support volunteers.



[Thanking a Volunteer](#)