

ASSESSING YOUR VOLUNTEER CULTURE Developing a positive volunteer culture

Why is culture important?

A positive culture – where volunteers feel appreciated and supported - can help attract volunteers while a negative culture will do just the opposite. By talking up (instead of down) the positive side of volunteering we can build a culture of belonging. One of the challenges teams, clubs, and organisations face is creating a 'contributing' culture. This is where members take part in running the organisation rather than treating it as a service.

Tips for building a good volunteer culture

They say many hands make light work. But far too often in sports clubs/organisations, you see one or two individuals shouldering the bulk of the work. As administrators, it is important you create a strong and positive volunteering culture. These tips apply and can be adapted to fit your environment:

1. Set expectations at sign up or at induction

As a club, you need to decide the club culture and volunteering expectations. Be clear and spell it out every time a new member joins the club. Most people don't mind helping out, they just need to know when and how. Is it once a week? Twice a season? Is it just selling a book of raffle tickets twice a year? Helping out at three events a year?

2. Remind people

You need as many people to help out with the day to day running of your club as possible. Promote the need for volunteers on your club's website and in newsletters. Comments like "your contribution makes a difference" or "help us at our next event" continually reminds members that there is a culture of helping out and volunteering at your club. Take a more business like approach, keep advertising until you fill the role – not just a one off!

3. Role descriptions

People are more likely to volunteer when they are asked to fill a specific role with an outline of the time commitment required. Have all roles clearly outlined and visible to your participants.

4. Focus on positive contributions and achievements

When you feel burdened by responsibility, it's all too easy to feel negative. But it is your responsibility as committee members or administrators to set the tone and the culture and that includes how you conduct yourself. Keep a positive attitude and thank those who were involved. It's more likely to change behaviour than pointing out those who don't help, as people will often become defensive.

5. Don't be afraid to ask

Don't be too shy to ask people for help with a call to action. People nowadays don't often think to proactively volunteer but when asked are more than happy to give their time. It is also a good idea not to ask big groups but rather ask individuals who will then make a team. This approach helps to create ownership and pride for these people in relation to the project.

6. Keep a skills register

This is very rarely done but is very useful. The register is simply a list of members with any specific skills. This helps you to be more specific about who to ask to fill which roles. For example, if you have a carpenter at your club and a door is starting to come loose they are more likely to be able to help quickly and efficiently, with little stress. People are more likely to volunteer if they have the time, knowledge, skills and inclination to do the job. Understanding the skillsets of the participants when they register is a way of building a skills register.

7. Subdivide large tasks into smaller tasks and delegate to subcommittees/project teams

This makes it easier for people to get involved. Creating project teams means that members can take ownership of the task and if necessary recruit their friends to be on their team to help.

8. Be flexible

With long working hours and commitments at home, some people may not wish to take on a formal role at the club that requires too much time and effort. However, you might find they are happy to take on smaller roles.

9. Build a roster

Those that find it difficult to commit weekly might be more comfortable adding their name to a roster and sharing a role. That way, several people can help out on a monthly basis.

10. Allow people to succeed

Don't try to take on too much. Don't try to do everything by yourself, other people will be capable too so give them the opportunity to succeed.

11. Train the people

The opportunity to learn new skills, such as First Aid, can often motivate people to get involved in the running of a club/team/organisation. And while people may be extremely capable in their day jobs, they may not have the know how to do certain tasks around the club but might feel uncomfortable asking for training. So be upfront about the training opportunities you offer.

Assessing the health of your culture

There are some key indicators that you can test to see if your club's culture is healthy or not.

- most players stay for a few years
- membership has increased or stayed the same during the past five years
- it is easy to get people to volunteer
- It is easy to get people to join a committee
- committee members enjoy their role and remain involved for a number of years
- committee meetings are efficient and effective
- volunteers help for more than one season
- people support social functions
- people support fundraisers
- there are few (or no) harassment/abuse/conflict issues within the club
- any issues are dealt with well
- club policies are supported (e.g. participation)
- officials are respected and appreciated by most members
- the workload is spread between many people
- new people are made to feel welcome
- the committee knows why people leave the club or their volunteer role
- our club is well respected in the wider community.