



International Student Volunteer Initiative

a guide to volunteering for international students.

part of Volunteering Qld's innovative engagement initiatives.

What is volunteering?

The term volunteering in the following information refers to the formal practice defined as an activity which takes place through not for profit organisations or projects and is undertaken:

- To be of benefit to the community and the volunteer
- Of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion
- For no financial payment
- In designated volunteer positions only

Volunteering takes place outside of any optional or compulsory university courses and happens as a result of a student applying for volunteer positions on their own volition.

There are plenty of reasons to volunteer

You can:

- Experience Australian culture
- Practice your English
- Meet new people
- Learn new skills
- Be part of a professional work environment
- Have fun while making a difference
- Improve your chances of getting paid work

Volunteering opportunities in Australia are endless

You can volunteer in your field of study, your area of expertise or in a completely new area learning new skills. Areas to volunteer in can include:

- Admin
- Marketing
- Arts
- Advocacy
- Conservation
- Education
- Retail
- Health
- Sports
- Welfare
- Working with animals
- + lots more...

Who can volunteer?

Volunteering positions require varying skills levels. Anyone who is willing to learn and contribute their time can apply to volunteer. As an international student, this is ideal, because you don't need to be an Australian citizen or permanent resident to volunteer.

How to find a volunteering opportunity

Search and apply for volunteering opportunities now, on Volunteering Qld's Linkki. Your university will also be able to connect you to volunteering opportunities, talk to careers and employment services. Also, keep an eye out for careers and volunteer expos. Lastly, don't be afraid to contact a nonprofit organisation directly about volunteering. Find one you like and approach them.

Volunteering Qld's website

Volunteering Qld is the peak body for volunteering in the state and has an excellent set of online resources for those looking for volunteering opportunities on its website. This site allows you to search and apply for volunteer opportunities listed by nonprofit organisations state-wide. Register a volunteer profile with your competencies, experience, qualifications, and availability through Skills Bank. Your profile will then be made available to nonprofit organisations who can offer you volunteer positions. Visit www.volunteeringqld.org.au

There are also other volunteering portals with a more local focus where you can search for volunteer opportunities in Queensland including those of the Volunteer Coordination Centres and of City Councils around the state.



International Student Volunteer *Anastassiya (Kazakhstan)*

Anastassiya is a Masters of Finance and Accounting student from Kazakhstan. Before starting with the Pyjama Foundation in 2011, she had 12 years of previous volunteering experience in her home country.

The organisation

The Pyjama Foundation is a mentoring program for children in foster care. The organisation aims to address the gap in educational (and other life) outcomes between children in care and their mainstream counterparts.

The role

At the Pyjama Foundation, Anastassiya has been performing in an administrative role. Her duties have included: maintaining the Pyjama Angel volunteer database, filing and various paperwork tasks and the preparation of play-based learning materials for the Pyjama Angels to use with their mentees (children in foster care).

The motivations

For Anastassiya, volunteering was a chance to share of herself and to develop strong professional relationships with new people: "Friendship is about sharing...your knowledge with others. Sharing what I can do and [my] experience with people [allowed me to be] a small part in the large vehicle, make a contribution to the organisation and to develop working relationship with other officers". Anastassiya also understood her volunteering effort as a way to express her identity, and her desire to do good in the world: "when we share, we make our world better. From what you do, people know who you are."

The benefits

In addition to the interpersonal skills that Anastassiya picked up while volunteering, she was able to improve her English communication skills and to increase her understanding of Australian culture simply by chatting with workmates. She feels that getting intercultural insights would not have been possible by simply living a 'normal (international student) life'.

The challenges

For Anastassiya, volunteering 7 hours per week meant that she had to become adept at managing her time and different commitments. She recommends that students consider carefully how much time they can give in between full-time study and part-time paid employment. For those working with international student volunteers, she recommends encouraging potential volunteers to plan out their time thoroughly in advance. To aspiring international student volunteers, she reminds them to consider that their volunteer roles might not necessarily correspond directly to their area of study, and to plan accordingly.

Careers and employment service at your university

Your university or education provider will be able to assist you in finding a position that meets your needs. Try contacting international student services, student services, or the careers and employment departments to enquire about available opportunities. Alternately you can also approach your lecturers and university staff. Many universities also organise Career and Volunteer Expos where you can connect with nonprofit organisations that are looking for volunteers.

Contact nonprofit organisations directly

Browse the web for volunteer opportunities with organisations that you are interested in or know or who works on a cause that you feel strongly about. Think about what you are good at, what you are interested in and passionate about, and consider how you could get involved in these areas. Don't hesitate to contact groups directly and introduce them to the experience and skills you could offer by volunteering for their organisation. You may be able to see a career advisor at your university to help you approach these organisations.

How do I apply to become a volunteer?

Each organisation recruiting volunteers has its own application process, in most cases you will need to complete an application form, have an interview, or attend an information session before you can start your volunteering experience. Some roles also require you to complete a police check or working with children check. If you need to do this, the organisation will assist you with the process.

When contacting an organisation try to find out if they have a volunteer coordinator whom you can approach. You can either visit, call or email organisations in order to inform them of your interest in volunteering, if you don't hear back within a week it is a good idea to follow up. When contacting an organisation provide them with your details including: name, contact number, contact details, where you study, where you are from, and explain your interests in volunteering with that organisation.

Once you have contacted an organisation you may expect a phone or personal interview with either the volunteer coordinator or a project coordinator from the organisation. At your interview or first contact, you should also highlight your previous volunteering experiences, what you have learned, the outcomes, and your expectations of becoming a volunteer here in Australia.

If the organisation decides you are the right person to take on the volunteer role you should expect to receive an induction and possibly some training about the organisation and your role. If after the interview you decide that the organisation or volunteer opportunity no longer suits you then you do not have to volunteer, inform the organisation of your decision and thank them for considering your application.

What if the organisation I approach doesn't take me on as a volunteer

There are many reasons why after an interview an organisation may choose to not take you on as a volunteer. If you feel comfortable it may be of use to you going forward to ask the person you have been in contact with what they based their decision on. Ask them for any tips or advice on who else you can approach to become a volunteer. The key thing is not to give up – find another organisation and try again, there are always a lot of organisations looking for volunteers it's just a matter of finding the right fit.



International Student Volunteer *Prasawad (Indonesia)*

Prasawad is studying for a Masters of Law. He has been volunteering with the St Vincent de Paul Society of Qld, in the VoRTCS (Volunteer Refugee Tutoring and Community Support) scheme.

The program

VoRTCS is a Special Works of the St Vincent de Paul Society of Qld. The program provides both tutoring and practical support for families who have recently arrived in Australia as refugees. Volunteer tutors assist young people with their homework and assignments, as well as parents and older family members who might be engaged in English language or other studies at TAFE. Volunteers are also on hand to read letters, help with forms and other practical assistance.

The role

Prasawad has been filling an administrative role while at VoRTCS. His work involves organising VoRTCS' archives, document management and moving files over to electronic storage. As a first time volunteer, Prasawad was unsure about his ability to take on large projects as well as do his university coursework. He instead requested a less complex role. After sometime working in the office, Prasawad says that he now feels ready for some 'frontline' work.

"My main interest is working with refugee families and I wanted to find about the programs here and learn about how to help. I will try to learn more about the social aspects and legal aspects about how I can help. I hope to learn here and be able to bring knowledge home about how to help refugee families."

Prasawad feels that his supervisor is receptive, and has no concerns about requesting a different role from him: "Yes, I feel comfortable to ask Jules to do a different role, because we talked about this at the start and he gave me what I asked for, and he is always interested to make sure that we are happy."

The challenges

Having asked for a role which would be less complex and 'heavy' than his Masters Coursework, Prasawad was assigned a task-based administrative role, which for him, became repetitive after a while: "At the beginning I wanted to do this, I have never volunteered before, and so this is something I thought I could do [but now] I want to try as many things as possible."

The benefit of working within the VoRTCS program is that there are a variety of volunteer roles on offer, including the direct, in-home family support and tutoring work, which is the main activity of the program, and where Prasawad will next use his skills. In addition to changing his role, Prasawad would like to focus on learning more about the Society, and the varied works that it does: "The next step is to join the tutor program, [as well as] focus on "getting to know more people and...more of the programs here, and what they do."

As a volunteer you have the right to:

- Be interviewed and engaged as a volunteer in accordance with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation.
- Orientation and training to do your volunteer work.
- Receive information about the organisation for which you are volunteering.
- Information about the organisation's policies and procedures that affect your work.
- Have your confidential and personal information dealt with in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth).
- A clearly written job description.
- Know to whom you are accountable.
- Be recognised as a valued team member.
- Be supported and supervised in your role.
- A healthy and safe working environment.
- Be protected by appropriate insurance (refer to *Fact Sheet: Insurance for Organisations Involving Volunteers* for further information).
- Say no if you feel you are being exploited.
- Be reimbursed for approved out-of-pocket expenses.
- Be advised of the organisation's travel reimbursement policy.
- Be informed and consulted on matters which directly or indirectly affect you and your work.
- Be made aware of the grievance procedure within the organisation.

As a volunteer you have the responsibility to:

- Be punctual and reliable.
- Respect others and the Privacy Act.
- Understand your job description.
- Carry out the work you have agreed to do responsibly and ethically.
- Be accountable and committed to the organisation.
- Undertake training as requested.
- Ask for support when you need it.
- Value and support other team members.
- Notify the organisation as soon as possible of absences or if you plan to leave the organisation.
- Adhere to the organisation's policies and procedures.
- Take reasonable care for your own health and safety.
- Take reasonable care that your conduct does not adversely affect the health and safety of others.
- Cooperate with any reasonable policy or procedure relating to health and safety at the workplace.

Checklist for volunteers

There are a number of things to consider when applying for a volunteer position with a nonprofit.

- Is the proximity of the position on offer an acceptable distance to your residence? If it is a considerable distance, are you able to cover your travel expenses as you may not be reimbursed by the organisation?
- Do you satisfy the requirements of the position which could include age, language and experience?
- Does the organisation have Volunteer Personal Accident and Public Liability Insurance to cover you for the volunteer work you will be doing? Are there any exclusions such as age limits or the type of voluntary work undertaken? (refer to *Fact Sheet: Insurance for Organisations Involving Volunteers* for further information).
- Have you met the necessary requirements to work with youth, the aged and/or disabled? Check with the organisation and they will advise you what is required, and how to apply for a card if necessary. Sometimes a Police Check will also be required.
- Is the organisation a nonprofit organisation or community project (i.e. not a private business or company)? You can be assured that organisations Volunteering Qld may refer you to fall into this category.
- Does the purpose of the organisation match your own values and beliefs?
- Does the organisation offer the sort of work that interests you and can maintain or develop your skills?
- Does the organisation have written volunteer policies explaining your rights and responsibilities and what you can expect from the organisation? Is it available for you to read?
- Does the organisation have written procedures that reflect Volunteering Qld's Code of Practice for Organisations Involving Volunteers?
- Is there a written job description for the volunteer position you are interested in and does it explain what you will be doing? Is the organisation willing to provide you with written information about itself? Volunteering Qld will normally provide you with such information.
- Does the organisation have a manager of volunteers or a contact person whose job is to support and supervise the volunteers?
- Will you receive adequate training and orientation to perform your job?
- Will the organisation provide you with a written reference if you need one?
- Will you be reimbursed for money spent on behalf of the organisation?





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