



Barriers to Volunteering First Nations People

In 2023, all volunteering peak bodies commissioned a report to identify barriers to volunteering and how to improve access and inclusion for First Nations people, people with disability, and newly arrived migrants. We have created a snapshot series to share the key findings, so volunteer-involving organisations feel equipped to engage volunteers from each group.

Please note, the language used in these snapshots follows the Australian Government's style manual. However, language is always evolving and varies by region. Always check with local peak bodies and relevant agencies in your area for the most appropriate language.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders simply help out – it is what they do."

"They likely do not see this as volunteering and are likely not attracted to that particular word, and thus any recruitment activity mentioning volunteering. They would prefer to help out, rather than volunteer, despite the result being the same."

- Interviewee

Who are First Nations people?

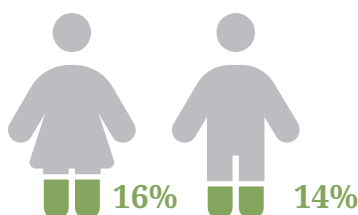
First Nations people is a collective term that encompasses all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the original inhabitants of Australia. They have the oldest continuing culture in the world, rich with diverse ways of living, traditions, and histories. Their experiences, and those of their ancestors, live within them and reflect their outlook on life. First Nations people place a high value on community, kinship, and cultural practices.

Barriers to volunteering

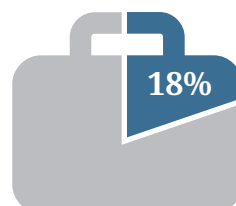
- Costs associated with volunteering such as transport.
- Discrimination and attitudinal issues.
- Misunderstanding of what volunteering means.
- Volunteering roles not advertised in First Nations communities.
- Fear of rejection and concerns about cultural safety.

The state of First Nations volunteering

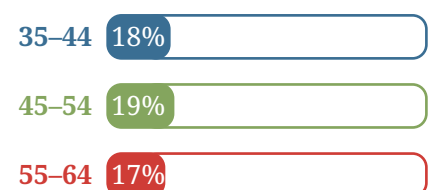
Based on 2021 records, First Nations people volunteer at a lower rate (15%) than non-Indigenous people (20%).



First Nations women are more likely to volunteer compared to men.



18% of employed First Nations people volunteer, compared to 11% of those unemployed.



Age groups most likely to volunteer

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Key insight

The term “volunteer” is a Western concept that First Nations people may not identify with. This doesn't mean they don't engage in or value volunteering activities. Traditional views of volunteering may not capture the ways they contribute.

First Nations communities thrive at supporting each other, including helping out, kinship care, and other family and community assistance. These activities align with volunteering but may not be reported due to differences in terminology.

Recommendations:

- **1. Improve cultural understanding:** Build empathy and respect with cultural awareness training, tailored to your region. It is vital to become more knowledgeable and culturally aware about your local language groups. Consider engaging a cultural advisor.
- **2. Build relationships:** Develop relationships with local communities and elders, focusing on building trust. Engage with them directly and respect their cultural protocols.
- **3. Language matters:** When using terms like “First Nations people” or “Aboriginal”, check what is appropriate by contacting your local elders. Where possible, use local context. For example, in Canberra refer to the Ngunnawal people.
- **4. True co-design:** You will have more success with First Nations volunteers by using a genuine co-design process.
- **5. Keep it simple:** When recruiting, here are some tips:
 - Start with a conversation not an application form.
 - Have group info sessions about roles, at a relaxed and culturally safe venue.
 - Reduce paperwork and keep the process simple.
- **6. Support volunteer needs:** Reimburse transport or admin costs connected to the role.

Learn more

[A guide to meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Volunteers](#)

[National Knowledge Base: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples](#)

For more support

Visit the [Knowledge Base](#) or your volunteering peak body website for helpful advice, information, and insights on engaging First Nations volunteers.



The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.

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