

# NSW Disability Inclusion Volunteering Guidelines



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## Acknowledgment of Country

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of Australia, and the oldest continuing culture in the world.

We pay respect to Elders past and present. We commit to respecting the lands we walk on and the communities we walk with.

We celebrate the deep and enduring connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Country and acknowledge their continuing custodianship of the lands, seas and sky.

We acknowledge the ongoing stewardship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the important contribution they make to our communities and economies.

We reflect on the continuing impact of government policies and practices and recognise our responsibility to work together with, and support, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities, towards improved economic, social and cultural outcomes. We support local decision-making and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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# Minister Harrison's message

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# Minister Washington's message



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# Introduction

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## Purpose of these Guidelines

The NSW Disability Inclusion Volunteering Guidelines are intended to help volunteer involving organisations to implement strategies that support effective recruitment, training, management and recognition of people with disability as active volunteers. These Guidelines provide a wide range of ideas on how to improve the volunteering journey by removing and reducing barriers to participation experienced by people with disability.

The Guidelines encourage organisations to consider how they are currently supporting people with disability and develop a plan that best fits their organisation to make improvements going forward.

They can be used as a standalone resource, or in conjunction with the [NSW Volunteering Charter](#) and/or the [NSW Youth Volunteering Guidelines](#).

This resource consolidates information to assist volunteer involving organisations to recruit and support volunteers with disability. While this document covers a range of topics and provides a comprehensive set of suggestions to consider, they are not exhaustive. You are encouraged to look at the related resources referred in this document as well as others that are released from time to time.

## Background

The NSW Disability Inclusion Volunteering Guidelines have been developed in response to recommendations made by the NSW Volunteering Taskforce. The Taskforce identified the need for volunteer involving organisations to build their capability to support volunteers with diverse needs, including people with disability. The Guidelines draw on current research and best practice.

## Context

Every volunteer is unique and comes to a volunteering role with their own ideas, desires, expectations and needs, irrespective of their various backgrounds. Often for people with disability these needs and desires are overlooked or are considered too difficult to accommodate. As evidenced in the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (also known as the Disability Royal Commission), people with disability can face a wide range of barriers throughout their lives including discrimination, exploitation, and abuse.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) is an international human rights convention which sets out the fundamental human rights of people with disability. Its objective is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and freedoms by all people with disability. Australia ratified the UN CRPD in 2008.

Although it is the responsibility of government to ensure its disability-related policies and programs support the UN CRPD, we all need to ensure that people with disability are afforded their rights. In the case of volunteering, people with disability should be given the same opportunities to participate and contribute to their communities as others.

The NSW Government is committed to ensuring that it delivers positive outcomes to people with disability by delivering on the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission, and building an inclusive State that encourages diversity and supports participation.

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## What do we mean by volunteering?

This document utilises the definition of ‘volunteering’ established by Volunteering Australia, which is:

### **Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.**

This definition draws attention to three areas which must be fulfilled for an activity to be considered volunteering:

- Firstly, that the time is willingly given, volunteering must not be exploitative or be used in place of paid employment.
- Secondly, that volunteering must be for the common good, directly, or indirectly benefiting people outside the family or household, or benefit a cause.
- Lastly, there is no financial gain, excluding reimbursement or the good practice of a volunteer being recognised or rewarded.

Volunteering includes formal volunteering for an organisation and informal volunteering, where people help in their community outside of formal arrangements with an organisation. Informal volunteering can include helping others in the community, outside an organisation or family unit. Informal volunteering can include spontaneous volunteering, for example where members of the public help in time of need during or after disasters.

## What do we mean by disability?

There are many definitions of disability used in Australia. Two definitions commonly used are:

- the contemporary social definition provided by the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and
- the national legal definition provided by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

Both definitions aim to protect against discrimination and help all people to understand their rights and responsibilities.

In addition to these definitions, it is also important to note that most disabilities aren't immediately apparent and not everyone who may be ‘legally’ considered to have disability will identify as having disability. Disability can be permanent or temporary, seen and unseen.

When planning targeted recruitment of volunteers with disability, organisations are encouraged to consider the below definitions, noting that the Disability Discrimination Act definition is used specifically for discrimination.

### United Nations definition

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that defines a person with disability as:

**Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.**

This definition adopts the *social model of disability*, which sees disability as a social construct. It recognises that ‘disability’ is a result of the interaction between people with disability and barriers that prevent them from participating in society on an equal basis to others.

### Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) definition

The DDA legislation that protects Australians against discrimination based on disability provides a broad definition of disability including these eight types:

- **Physical disability:** Impacts mobility or dexterity
- **Intellectual disability:** Impacts ability to learn or process information.
- **Sensory disability:** Impacts the ability to hear or see.
- **Neurological disability:** Impacts the brain and central nervous system.
- **Learning disability:** Impacts acquisition, organisation, retention, and understanding of information.
- **Physical disfigurement:** Impacts physical appearance.
- **Immunological disability:** Impact due to the presence of organisms causing disease in the body.

This is referred to as the *medical model of disability* which focuses on people's health conditions, impairments, or deficits.

## What do we mean by accessibility?

**Accessibility** means that people with disability are able to access the same goods, services, facilities, premises and information as those without disability. Considerations should include the physical, technical, and cultural aspects of accessibility. Improving accessibility means removing barriers that prevent people from participating fully and establishing processes and systems that allow everyone equal access.

Throughout these Guidelines we have included suggestions and ideas that you may like to implement in your organisation to help ensure that the volunteering journey is accessible for all, including people with disability.

## What do we mean by inclusion?

**Inclusion** means that people with disability are able to fully participate without prejudice. They are authentically made to feel valued, welcomed, respected, included, represented, and heard. It means that people with disability have equal opportunities to participate whilst ensuring barriers to participation are identified and removed. It is important to highlight however, that inclusion does not mean integration. Inclusion ensures opportunities and supports are tailored to the individual's needs.

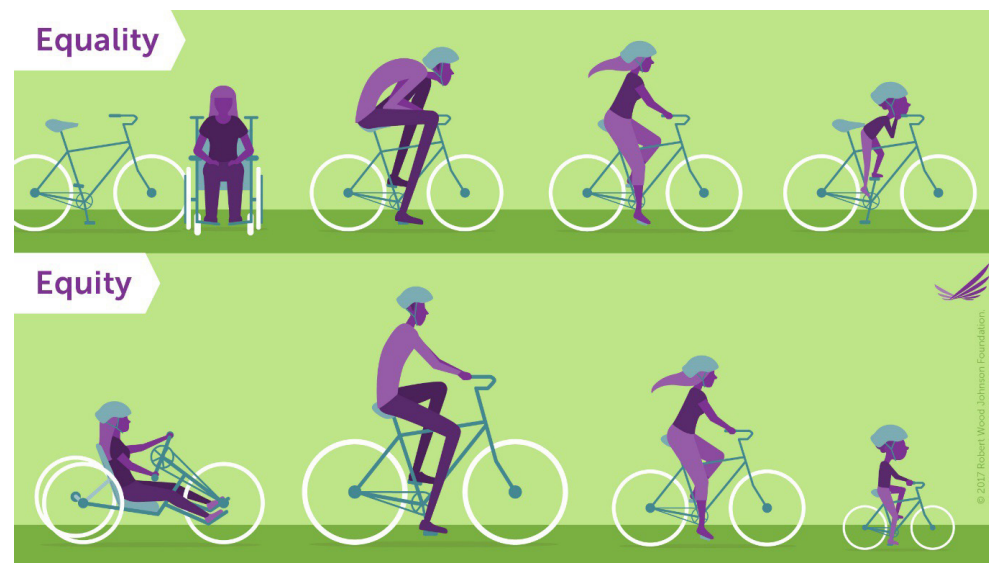
By welcoming people with different abilities and removing the limitations we place on them, we can build strong and vibrant communities enriched by diversity.

## Equality versus equity

Understanding the difference between **equality** and **equity** is fundamental. Having this understanding ensures that we are putting the right measures in place for those who need it.

Equality is the assumption that everyone benefits from the same supports. This is equal treatment. Whereas equity is when everyone gets the supports that they need, which then creates equity.

Making things equal does not mean that we are making things fair. To make sure that we are creating equity, we need to recognise that everyone starts from a different place and those who are disadvantaged may need some additional support. We need to remove the barriers that cause inequity so that everyone has an equal starting point.



*Reproduced with permission of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Princeton, N.J.*

## Why do we need these Guidelines?

People with disability regularly experience barriers that prevent them from accessing businesses, services, workplaces, and public areas within communities. However, people with disability report that the biggest barriers to participation are around the stigma associated with disability and the lack of understanding and bias, whether conscious or unconscious.

Everyone, individuals and organisations, has a responsibility to ensure that people with disability are provided the same equity to access people without disability are afforded. People with disability have the right to full and effective participation in society.



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The social model of disability aims to change society's views around disability by addressing physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers by tailoring support to the individual's needs, affording everyone equitable access to opportunities.

It is hoped that by providing some insights into the simple things that can be done to eliminate barriers to participation, we will be able to improve the volunteering journey for people with disability.

Whether incremental or transformational, change needs to happen. By working together to address assumptions, stereotypes, technological, physical and cultural barriers we can implement changes that positively impact people, places and communities.

## How to use these Guidelines

These Guidelines are designed to be a flexible, adaptive tool that supports your organisation to implement strategies that will increase the participation of people with disability in volunteering roles.

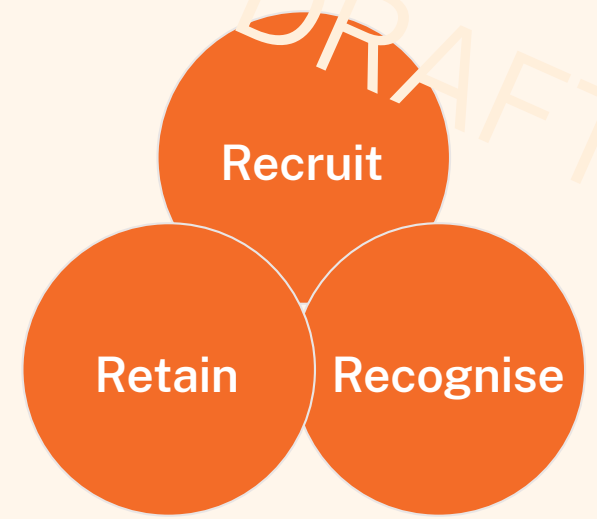
It is up to you to determine how you would like to implement the Guidelines, you can pick and choose what ideas suit you and your workplace. Your organisation may already be doing a lot to build inclusion and accessibility. You don't have to implement everything, and each organisation will be different.

It is hoped that the Guidelines will help you to reflect on what your organisation is doing to support people with disability and make changes where you think necessary. Use the Working Pages throughout the Guidelines to jot down ideas that are relevant as you read through. This will likely change over time, so consider doing an annual review to see what is working and what isn't. Remember, increasing accessibility and inclusion won't happen immediately, but through continuous improvement changes will build over time and have lasting effects.

The suggestions listed in the Recruit, Retain and Recognise chapters of these Guidelines align with many of the suggestions made by the Australian Disability Network and other organisations. We encourage readers of this document to explore resources such as those listed in the *Reference Documents* section. For example, the Australian Disability Network has helpful 'Choose Inclusion' resources which can be found at <https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/>.

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# Pillars and Principles

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# Pillars and Principles

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Adopting an inclusive approach to engaging people with disability as volunteers will lead to better recruitment, retention and further engagement and participation. The NSW Government is committed to increasing opportunities for diverse volunteers that generate supportive, community-based partnerships between people with disability and volunteer involving organisations. This requires flexible and responsive strategies designed to meet the needs of diverse volunteers, communities, and organisations. The future of the NSW Volunteering Sector relies on its ability to adapt and be inclusive.

People with disability are valuable assets and contributors to the NSW volunteering sector. They bring new perspectives, skills, experience and energy. NSW has much to gain from enabling their volunteering contributions to flourish, however we need to work together to make it happen. By opening up opportunities to everyone, the sector will not only reflect the diversity of our communities, but we will also be better able to meet the needs of the communities that we serve.

These Guidelines are shaped by three overarching Pillars –

## Recruit

Increase participation by people with disability across all parts of the volunteering community by improving accessibility and inclusive practices which enable people with disability to have an active presence in the volunteering sector. This includes Principles: **Accessibility; Supportive relationship; Clear communication; Authentic voice of people with disability; Team building; Reflection.**

## Retain

Support the continued participation of people with disability in the volunteering sector by providing a range of suitable, meaningful, and diverse roles and experiences that are informed by people with disability. This includes Principles: **Accessibility; Supportive relationships; Clear communication; Authentic voice of people with disability; Team building; Knowledge and skill building; Network building; Reflection.**

## Recognise

Develop and implement inclusive recognition programs that acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of all volunteers in a variety of ways. This includes Principles: **Authentic voice of people with disability; Reflection; Recognition.**

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Diagram 1:  
Disability Inclusion  
Volunteering Framework

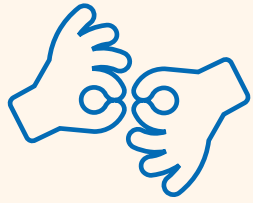


**Table 1: Disability Inclusion Volunteering Principles**

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<p><b>Accessibility</b></p>	<p>Volunteer involving organisations consider the improvements needed to ensure greater accessibility for people with disability. This not only means physical access, but also having an inclusive culture, accessible communications (i.e. the use of technology and the availability of communication in a range of formats) and embedding flexibility.</p>
<p><b>Supportive relationships</b></p>	<p>Colleagues are available to support and/or mentor people with disability in volunteering roles, dependent on their need.</p>
<p><b>Clear communication</b></p>	<p>Communicate clearly and openly with people with disability in a way that is preferred by them and effective for them. Clear communication should include appropriate language in reference to people with disability.</p>
<p><b>Authentic voice of people with disability</b></p>	<p>The voices and perspectives of people with disability, including young people with disability, are prioritised, and they are encouraged to participate and be involved in decisions that impact them.</p>
<p><b>Team building</b></p>	<p>Develop a supportive and cohesive team of volunteers which includes volunteers with disability.</p>
<p><b>Knowledge and skill building</b></p>	<p>Support people with disability to lead activities by building their confidence, knowledge and skills (e.g. leadership, planning, critical thinking, decision making).</p>
<p><b>Network building</b></p>	<p>Develop community-based connections with internal and external stakeholders (e.g. fellow volunteers, community groups, local government). This legitimises their roles and empowers them to feel respected and capable of creating change in the community. Connections are a critical factor for success and are key to volunteers establishing and maintaining ongoing volunteer participation and a sense of community belonging.</p>
<p><b>Recognition</b></p>	<p>Volunteers, including volunteers with disability are recognised for the contributions they make to volunteering activities.</p>
<p><b>Reflection</b></p>	<p>The activity is continuously evaluated to ensure it meets the motivations, interests, and needs of volunteers, including volunteers with disability. This provides an opportunity for growth, role adaption and flexibility.</p>

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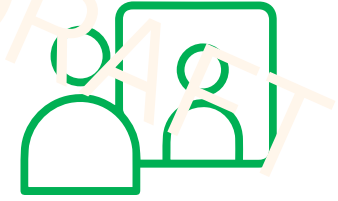
# Pillar: Recruit

Increase participation by people with disability across all parts of the volunteering community by improving accessibility and inclusive practices which enable people with disability to have an active presence in the volunteering sector. This includes Principles: Accessibility; Supportive relationship; Clear communication; Authentic voice of people with disability; Team building; Reflection.

Diagram 2:  
Recruit – Principles



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# Pillar: Recruit

Volunteering opportunities may not always be accessible, visible, or available to everyone. The door to volunteering needs to be opened further to enable more people to join in, contribute and experience the many benefits that volunteering provides.

For people with disability the benefits of volunteering can be life changing. It can provide opportunities for social, economic, and cultural inclusion. People with disability across Australia experience higher rates of unemployment and lower rates of labour force participation compared with people without disability. Volunteering can be a valuable pathway into employment.

The experience people with disability have during the recruitment process can leave a lasting impression, be it positive or negative. By adopting inclusive recruitment processes, the door to volunteering swings open to a bigger, more diverse pool of potential volunteers.

How volunteers are recruited will have a huge impact on the success of volunteering programs, services, and activities. Consider your recruitment channels and practices. This is your organisation's first 'sell' or 'marketing' opportunity to promote your organisation and all the great things it does. It is the first chance for people with disability to decide to 'opt in' and give it a try. This is the volunteer's initial contact with your organisation, you can only make a first impression once, make it a good one.

## Engaging people with disability

Here are some practical suggestions your organisation can implement to improve the recruitment process, ensuring it is more considerate and inclusive of people with disability.

- **Language matters.** Person-first language (people with disability e.g. "person with schizophrenia") and identity-first language (disabled people e.g. "autistic person") are both used in Australia. People with disability often have strong preferences for one term or the other, so it is best to follow the lead of the person or group you are talking about and wish to recruit. It's okay to ask. If that isn't possible, use person-first language or refer to a person by their name.
- **Create connections.** Reach out to local Disabled People's Organisations (DPO) by writing or visiting them or having a presence at relevant expos or events.
- **Plan** the volunteering needs of your organisation. Think about how you will meet the needs of your organisation and diverse volunteers in tandem. Consider feedback you may have received and use it to create positions that suit diverse volunteers.
- **Consult people with disability in the design of your recruitment strategies.** It is important that the strategies are informed and shaped by the voices of those who they are meant for. Remember the phrase adopted across the disability community – '*Nothing about us without us*'.
- **Use plain English and language** in all your communication, including on your website, social media posts, in newsletters and recruitment advertisements. This will ensure that more people have a clearer understanding about your organisation. It will also encourage a wider pool of potential volunteers to consider volunteering with your organisation.



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- **Make finding volunteering opportunities as easy as possible.** Use platforms such as SEEK Volunteer or the NSW Volunteer Recruitment Portal, and social media as well as traditional advertising methods to advertise roles. You may also consider promoting opportunities through disability employment agencies or disability services.
  - **Keep your recruitment messages clear, concise, and consistent.** Your organisation's initial communications should prioritise the information you want to tell them, it needs to appeal to them. Deliver your information in the simplest way possible to ensure easy access for all audiences.
  - Provide **clear role descriptions** to potential volunteers. This will ensure they have clear expectations around what the role will involve, including the time commitment and what parts of the role can be changed, for example the role can be done remotely. Role descriptions don't always have to be rigid. Allow for negotiation if it is needed.
  - **Create opportunities for volunteers that are flexible, affordable and accessible.** Remember, this may be different for young people with disability compared to adults with disability, or potential volunteers who have different abilities or needs. Be flexible and adapt to the individual's needs.
  - **Consider if all your current prerequisite criteria are necessary,** for example prior experience or a driver's license. This may encourage a larger number of people to consider the role.
  - Ensure **information about disability that is obtained through the application process is not used as a selection criterion.** If someone discloses information about their disability during this stage, it should not be used to make an assessment about their ability to undertake a role, but to assist them with any reasonable adjustments they may need during the process.
  - Include a statement in your advertisements that you **welcome applications from all interested people**, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds.
  - **Build accessible processes into your organisations recruitment process** to encourage people with disability to apply for roles. Consider whether your processes and procedures are flexible and able to adapt for diverse abilities, such as providing different ways for potential volunteers to provide their information. You might wish to provide an online and a paper option.
  - Only ask for **information that is essential** at this stage. Prospective volunteers do not need to provide their diagnosis or medical history to secure a volunteering role. Emergency contact details, allergies, and medication they are taking can be collected during the onboarding process and not as part of the application process.
  - Ensure the **diversity of your community is reflected** in your recruitment campaigns, website, and other communications.
  - When producing documents that will be published digitally, be sure they meet the **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)**, which provide an internationally recognised standard on how to produce digital content that is more accessible for people with disability.
  - Use an **accessibility checker** on all documents that are published by your organisation. This will ensure assistive technology like screen readers and text magnifiers can be used effectively.
  - **Avoid using jargon and acronyms** in marketing materials. If required, always include a glossary or an explanation.
  - Create **opportunities for varying levels of skills and ability.** For example, a young person with disability should not feel excluded or stereotyped.
  - Consider **advertising opportunities specifically seeking people with disability** or from diverse backgrounds. This may be volunteering roles or committee member roles.
  - **Promote the benefits of volunteering.** Volunteering is mutually beneficial to both the organisation and the volunteer, and it's important to publicise these benefits to the community. For example, volunteering can provide a credible pathway to employment helping the person to gain skills and experience. This may include communication skills, customer service skills, administration skills, project coordination skills, problem solving and time management skills, teamwork and collaboration. Consider the motivations of your current and potential volunteers. Remember volunteering is not a one-way transaction, volunteers regardless of age or ability need to feel like it is benefiting them as well as others.
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- Understand **unconscious bias**. This is our perceptions, stereotypes, and assumptions about people with disability. This can act as a big barrier for people with disability to get involved as volunteers. Ideas assumptions and stereotypes can be combatted by creating inclusive cultures and embracing diversity. By normalising diverse workplaces with people of all abilities, skills and backgrounds, we focus less on our differences and more of the things we have in common.
  - Be aware of **ableism**. *Ableism* can be described as how society tends to favour people without disability through laws, institutional policies and practices that perpetuate the idea that people with disability are not equal, and that they are less capable. It is a specific form of prejudice, like racism, sexism or any other form of discrimination that targets a particular group based on a characteristic perceived as different or inferior.
  - Be conscious that people with disability may have experienced **trauma and/or discrimination** because of their disability. You may need to earn their trust.
  - Whenever possible, work to make your organisation as **physically accessible** as possible. This may mean having a ramp to access your front door, having the office doors open if they are not automatic, or having accessible car parking spaces available nearby.
  - Consider how you might be able to **support school leavers from specialist schools**. These students may not receive the same structured support when transitioning from school into employment that other students do. Volunteering can be an effective pathway into paid employment. You may like to contact schools to discuss holding an open day or group volunteering opportunities.
  - **Include testimonials** from other volunteers with disability in recruitment promotion material, so that potential volunteers not only see that your organisation is supportive and inclusive of people with disability, but people with disability can see themselves reflected – ‘*You can’t be what you can’t see*’.
  - If someone applies for a volunteer role where you think they **do not meet the essential requirements**, first think carefully about whether you are making assumptions or stereotyping, or whether there is a genuine question over the person’s ability to do the role. Have a conversation with the person about how they would manage the essential requirements of the role. Try to work through possible solutions to overcome any issues or concerns.
  - Make sure your **office space is welcoming** of everyone. This means ensuring your organisation adopts practices across all aspects of your business to ensure the safety of people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people from LGBTQIA+ communities, young people, and anyone else who may otherwise feel marginalised.
  - Consider holding **open days**. Invite people with disability along to your organisation to meet existing volunteers and see what your organisation does. This may provide you with an opportunity to discuss how you could better support people with disability in your organisation.
  - **Involve existing volunteers with disability during the interview and onboarding processes**. This demonstrates that people with disability have a genuine role to play in the organisation.
  - Ensure the **onboarding process is simple and timely**. Provide the new volunteer with the things they will need for the role as quickly as possible and ensure that any additional requirements are arranged in a timely fashion.
  - **Offer additional support** to those who may need it. This could be providing information in various formats, offering Auslan interpreters for Auslan users, or offering the person to bring a support person along with them to the interview. Remember, some potential volunteers may have supports available through their NDIS Plan. Be open to a conversation about what may or may not be needed as not every person with disability has the same needs, and not everyone has a NDIS Plan.
  - **Ask what the person’s interests are** so that you can match them with an interesting, enjoyable, suitable and/or available role.
  - Be aware that **new starters may feel nervous or anxious**, and some people with disability may experience higher levels of anxiety. Be prepared for this and develop strategies to help minimise these feelings.
  - **Streamline processes**. Ensure that all your processes, including onboarding processes, are as simple and straightforward as possible and reduce any duplication where possible.
  - **Reflect** on recruitment campaigns and how they could be improved next time.
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## Pillar: Recruit – Questions to think about

Things we are doing:

Things we will keep:

Things we will change:

What we will do that's new:



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# Pillar: Retain

Support the continued participation of people with disability in the volunteering sector by providing a range of suitable, meaningful, and diverse roles and experiences that are informed by people with disability. This includes Principles: Accessibility; Supportive relationships; Clear communication; Authentic voice of people with disability; Team building; Knowledge and skill building; Network building; Reflection.

Diagram 3:  
Retain – Principles



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# Pillar: Retain

Once a volunteer has chosen your organisation, it is vital that you support, encourage and develop them so that their volunteering experience is a positive one and they want to continue their involvement with your organisation. By offering a workplace that is welcoming, inclusive, accessible, respectful, diverse, and continually evolving, you create an environment that people want to be part of.

Volunteering is not a one-way transaction. While volunteers make a commitment to organisations and causes, they should also feel that their own volunteering goals are able to be met. It is for this reason that the motivations of diverse volunteers need to be recognised and responded to in order to support their continued involvement. Often people with disability are looking to contribute to a need or cause that resonates with them. With this in mind, a number of strategies can be implemented to satisfy both the needs of your volunteers and your organisation.

For people with disability there may be some additional things to think about to ensure that their needs are being met and to maintain an ongoing positive volunteering relationship.

## Ways to retain volunteers

- Once onboarded with your organisation, ask volunteers if they have any additional **access or support requirements**. Not everyone will identify as a person with disability, this may be because of cultural perspectives or that they do not use the label 'disabled'. Be thoughtful around how you approach conversations about a perceived disability and respect everyone's right to privacy.
- **Use appropriate language**. A person with disability is not just their disability. Be sure that you use appropriate language that no one will be offended by.
- **Assess your organisation's accessibility**. Think about not only the physical access of the venue, facilities, or workplace, but also workplace attitudes, workplace technology and reasonable adjustments. Visit the Australian Human Rights Commission website to find more information on workplace accessibility. Also, it's a good idea to talk to all your volunteers to get their feedback and suggestions on any improvements that could be made.
- If you are planning on making any changes to your physical workplace or moving to a new location, adopt a universal design approach. **Universal design** is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.
- Think about developing a **Disability Inclusion Action Plan**. This is a document that sets out your organisation's strategy to identify and address practices which might result in discrimination against people with disability, and to promote recognition of the rights of people with disability. It details how an organisation's workplace, products, and services are accessible and inclusive to people with disability, and informs the public on how it is approaching diversity and inclusion.

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- Consider any **reasonable adjustments** that volunteers may require. Reasonable adjustment refers to any administrative, environmental, or procedural changes that enable a person with disability to have equal opportunity and work effectively and comfortably. Talk through the requirements with the volunteer. The most commonly requested adjustments are free or low cost – for example, a request to work in the mornings rather than evenings, or that a manager makes contact via email rather than phone. The adjustments may not always be practical or affordable, but assess each request on a case-by-case basis and make all practical attempts to offer an adjustment where you can. Some adjustments can be simple and easy to implement, while others may require seeking financial support through grants or other means to implement improvements. Contact the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) if you need assistance regarding reasonable adjustments.
  - Think about **establishing a process for reasonable adjustment requests** in your organisation. This should put the volunteer first and ensure that privacy is maintained throughout.
  - **Create space for and amplify the voices of people with disability.** Provide opportunities for everyone to have their say. This needs to be offered in a range of formats to ensure equal opportunity for everyone to contribute, such as a group check-in, regular one-to-one meetings, or an anonymous suggestions box.
  - **Provide a safe, secure, and healthy environment.** While organisations need to comply with Work Health and Safety (WHS) legislation (when it applies), effort should also be taken to ensure volunteers with disability are made to feel welcome and safe. This could be by adjusting the organisation's practices, ensuring everyone understands safety procedures, adjusting language and culture and signage used by your organisation to ensure everyone feels included.
  - **Maintain regular and proactive communication.** This will help you to build relationships and address little problems before they become big problems.
  - **Review policies, practices and documentation** to ensure inclusivity is embedded in how your organisation operates. This should extend across all aspects of your organisation from your committee to activities to communications, and documentation such as membership forms.
  - Ensure everyone's **personal information and privacy is maintained and respected.** Personal information is provided on a need-to-know basis only.
  - Information about disability is a person's **private health information.** This is covered under various Privacy Acts and it should not be shared without consent.
  - Ensure your **board or committee members reflect your community.** Increase representation of members to include people with all different abilities and backgrounds.
  - Consider **amending your constitution to embed the voice of people with disability.** This ensures that people with disability have a voice in decisions that impact them.
  - **Establish systems.** Ensure there are systems in place to respond to any complaints or notifications of concern, creating a safe working environment for everyone.
  - Consider setting **diversity targets** to take affirmative action to diversify areas of your organisation.
  - **Build a positive culture** within your organisation based on shared values. Everyone, including people with disability, will be drawn to organisations where the culture is inclusive and welcoming, everyone is respected, people are free to express themselves and have their voices heard, and where negative behaviour is challenged, and discrimination tackled.
  - Think about the actions that you have already put in place to remove barriers for people with disability. This may not be obvious to people outside of your organisation, so think about ways you can **promote how you are supporting people with disability.**
  - There are likely already volunteers involved in your organisation who have disability. **Check-in on your existing volunteers** to ensure they have what they need to undertake their role. And remember, this may change with time as a volunteer's circumstances or needs may change.
  - Use the **same feedback and evaluation processes for all volunteers,** including those with disability. This is an important element of being inclusive.
  - **Keep volunteers informed** about what is happening within the organisation so they feel part of the team. This could be through a regular newsletter, email, meeting, or message board. This should include not only day-to-day updates, but updates on the organisation's direction and initiatives. Ensure these are in formats that are accessible to everyone.
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- Ensure **digital accessibility**. All your digital products and services should provide equitable access to all regardless of a person's needs or preferences. Ensure policies and procedures, including emergency procedures, are written clearly and are available in different formats, such as large print and Plain English. Also, remember to include captions on any video resources produced and include alternative text on images.
  - **Build as much flexibility into volunteering roles as is possible**. Ensure location, hours and responsibility are considered when matching a volunteer to a role. This will allow volunteering to fit around the person's schedule. You may also need to consider adapting the role to the person. Consider things such as remote working or volunteering from home, if more breaks are required, or if you need to position them within easy access of an accessible toilet. This allows the role to fit around a volunteer's needs.
  - Provide **pathways for people with disability to become mentors** for new and existing volunteers. This can be an effective way to retain volunteers, while also building their leadership skills and confidence. A mentor role for a person with disability has the potential to increase social inclusion and help address stigma and marginalisation.
  - Ensure **volunteering opportunities are affordable** to support participation. People with disability may come from a lower socio-economic background, making the need for affordable roles essential. Reasonable out-of-pocket expenses should be reimbursed, no one should be excluded from volunteering due to the cost of volunteering.
  - **Assign tasks and roles to volunteers based on strengths**. Consider the existing transferrable skills that all volunteers come with and ways that these skills can be utilised and adapted to support the organisation. This will also provide volunteers with a greater sense of purpose, respect, and value.
  - Consider providing **short-term project-based opportunities** for volunteers. If a volunteer is not required to make an ongoing commitment, they may be more encouraged to participate. These kinds of opportunities allow volunteers to see the type of volunteering work your organisation undertakes.
  - Consider that some people with disability may need a **support person** to assist them to successfully engage with your organisation. Work with the volunteer and their support person to ensure they are supported to undertake the role. However, remember that the person with disability is the volunteer, not the support person. The support person does not need to go through the onboarding process.
  - Offer **one-to-one support** when it may be needed. This may support the volunteer to build confidence in the task they are undertaking, allowing them to further develop their skills and knowledge.
  - Ensure that your organisation **demonstrates inclusivity consistently** across all aspects of the business. All volunteers value integrity and displays of inclusivity need to be genuine.
  - Ensure **open communication channels** are available to all volunteers allowing them to share concerns in a supportive space.
  - Adopt a **collaborative approach** when developing solutions to issues. By involving a broad range of perspectives and ideas to address challenges will ensure that a solution that is effective for all is implemented.
  - **Hold regular group check-ins** and group catch-ups with volunteers. This may help to build cohesion and inclusion amongst the volunteers.
  - Provide ongoing opportunities for further skill development in the role through **training and support**. This may include hands on experience in different roles. A schedule of training should be available to all volunteers to identify upcoming training they are interested in. All volunteers should also be able to provide comments and ideas about training they would like to do.
  - Consider establishing a **Disability Advisory Group** or process for people to provide feedback and suggest improvements about making the organisation more accessible and inclusive.
  - Offer **Disability Awareness training**. This can be accessed through a range of accredited training organisations. Training must align with the six key principles to good practice in disability responsiveness as outlined in Australian Council of Learned Academies' (ACOLA) report *Ensuring Occupations are Responsive to People with Disability*. A link to this resource can be found in the Resources section.
  - Embrace **co-design**. This means working with all people who will be impacted by the program, initiative, policy, or change. It means allowing opportunities for those involved to share their thoughts and influence decisions throughout the design process.
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- **Access to transport** can be a significant barrier to participation for people with disability. Some volunteers cannot travel by public transport and may need to use taxis or community transport providers. Consider ways that this can be factored into the way you work. This could be, identifying in funding applications the costs involved to address volunteers access and support needs, or forming partnerships with local transport providers.
  - Some volunteers lead complex lives and may need to dip in and out of their volunteering. Be mindful and **offer support not judgement** if a volunteer's commitment to tasks or the organisation is impacted.
  - Use the **NSW Volunteer Charter**. This shows your organisation's commitment to ensuring a safe workplace for all volunteers, including people with disability.
  - Make sure that volunteers know they can have **time off** and are allowed to say that they are unavailable.
  - Ensure that all your volunteers are aware of the **mental health and wellbeing resources** available to them including the resources that you have within your organisation or within the community.
  - Conduct **informal exit interviews** when possible. This will allow you to gain insights into the person's experience volunteering with your organisation and may provide an opportunity for improvements to be made.

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## Pillar: Retain – Questions to think about

Things we are doing:

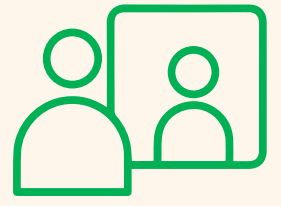
Things we will keep:

Things we will change:

What we will do that's new:

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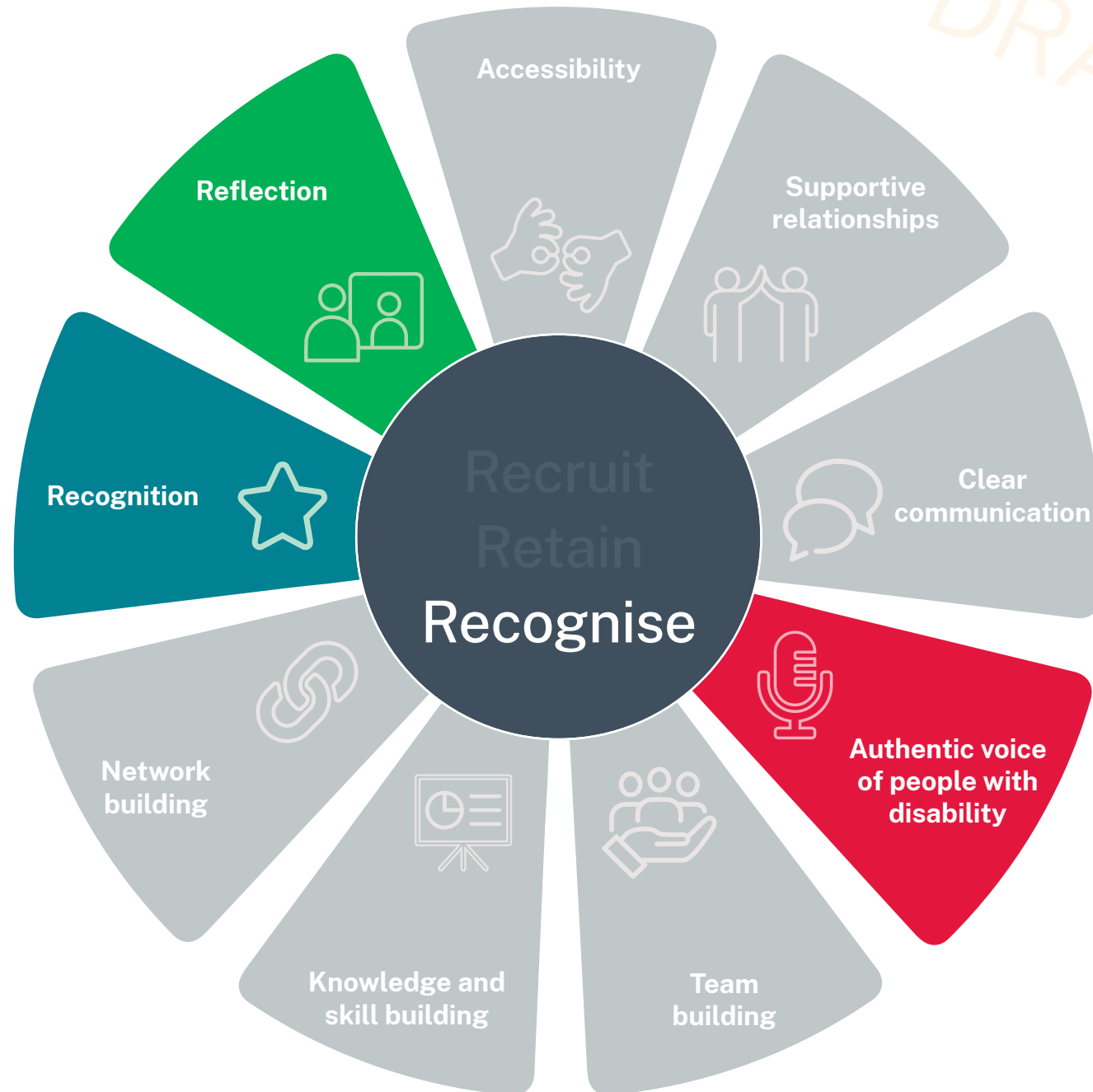
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# Pillar: Recognise

Develop and implement inclusive recognition programs that acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of all volunteers in a variety of ways. This includes Principles: Authentic voice of people with disability; Recognition.

Diagram 4:  
Recognise – Principles



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# Pillar: Recognise

All volunteers appreciate some kind of recognition for their contribution, whether it's a private 'thank you' or a nomination for an award. Acknowledging the contributions and achievements of volunteers with disability is no different from recognising other volunteers.

Acknowledging the contributions made by volunteers authentically and genuinely shows that your organisation is appreciative and values their input. If a volunteer feels valued, they are more likely to continue to volunteer.

People with disability are not a homogenous group and do not share the same views on everything. When acknowledging and showcasing the contributions that volunteers with a disability make, it is important to do this through a variety of means. And to be sure your organisation is getting it right, it is important to ask how volunteers would like to be recognised first.

## How to recognise volunteers

Below are some suggestions to consider when recognising volunteers with disability.

- To ensure that you are recognising volunteers with disability in a way that suits them, **don't forget to ask!**
- Enable people with disability to have a say or role on your organisation's committee. Give volunteers a **formal voice** by having dedicated role/s for volunteers with disability on your governance committee.
- Ensure your **recognition program** is ongoing and broad, allowing everyone to be celebrated. This could include certificates of recognition.
- Ensure **everyone can be recognised** as part of your recognition program – no one should feel or perceive that they are not being acknowledged because of any factors, such as disability, race, sexual identity, gender, beliefs, or age.
- **Check how** your volunteer wants to be talked about and if their disability can be disclosed publicly.
- **Say thank you privately and publicly.** Recognition should not only be carried out through formal programs but should also be offered spontaneously. Take the time to acknowledge the contributions and growth of your volunteers reflecting on outcomes achieved.
- **Hold an event** for National Volunteer Week, International Day of Volunteers and/or National Student Volunteer Week. Allow all volunteers to be involved in the planning and delivery of these events.
- **Provide a written reference** for your volunteers or be a referee when they are seeking a job or preparing their resume.

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- Acknowledge your volunteers through **social media posts**. Remember to respect the privacy of all your volunteers, and ensure you have appropriate permissions before posting on social media.
  - It's good to recognise the diversity of your volunteers, including volunteers with disability. However, prior to publishing any images, make sure that you have **appropriate photo permissions** in place. Remember that your volunteers have the right to withdraw their consents.
  - Inform volunteers about the **outcomes or impacts** that they have contributed to. We don't always close the loop and let those involved know how things turned out. By providing updates, volunteers will feel more valued and have a sense of personal achievement.
  - **Consider nominating your volunteers for an award**. There are several awards programs available that recognise your volunteers including the NSW Community Sports Awards and the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards.
  - Show your appreciation by **occasionally providing food and drink for all your volunteers**. Hosting a morning or afternoon tea, or hosting a special gathering is a good way to say thank you to all your volunteers.
  - Establish an **ambassador program or council** that will enable volunteers with disability to provide valuable advice and guidance to the organisation based on their own lived experience.
  - Establish a **mentoring program or peer support group** matching volunteers with experienced volunteers within your organisation. Mentors will help volunteers with advice, support, and encouragement with their volunteering career.
  - When a volunteer decides to end their volunteering journey with your organisation, **celebrate their achievements** and how they have contributed to your organisation/the cause, because all contributions no matter how big or small are valuable and make a difference.
  - Take **photos of your volunteers in action** for use in promotional and marketing campaigns. Remember to obtain the relevant consent required to use any images.
  - **Celebrate and acknowledge the personal growth** of volunteers throughout their involvement with your organisation, for example an increase in confidence, or improvements in public speaking.
  - **Celebrate volunteers' anniversaries and milestones**. For example, achieving a level of skill, contributing so much to the community, or making a particular contribution.
  - **Consider alternative options for recognition** such as clothing or merchandise which can be used, worn or displayed.

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## Pillar: Recognise – Questions to think about

Things we are doing:

Things we will keep:

Things we will change:

What we will do that's new:

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# Additional things to consider

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## United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) sets out to clarify and qualify how all human rights apply to people with disability. Despite being already protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the rights of people with disability are often violated.

The UN CRPD aims to enhance opportunities for people with disability to participate in all aspects of social and political life including access to employment, education, health care, information, justice, public transport and the built environment.

Australia ratified the UN CRPD in 2008. Responsibility for ensuring the rights of people with disability is shared by Federal and State and Territory Governments. The Attorney-General's Department and the Department of Social Services work together to promote and monitor implementation of the UN CRPD.

## Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031

Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031 is a national framework that all governments in Australia have signed up to. It sets out a plan for continuing to improve the lives of people with disability in Australia over ten years. To view the Strategy, visit Australia's Disability Strategy Hub <https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/ads>.

## Closing the Gap

It has been estimated that the prevalence of disability among First Nations peoples is up to twice the rate experienced by other Australians. First Nations peoples experience individual and systemic discrimination (ableism and racism). This has a compounding effect which creates further social, economic, health and wellbeing inequalities.

Disability has been recognised as a cross-cutting outcome under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. *The Disability Sector Strengthening Plan* has been developed to improve understanding, support for, and representation of First Nations peoples with disability, across all Commonwealth policy, programs and services consistent with Priority Reforms One, Three and Four.

## National Disability Insurance Scheme

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides funding to eligible people with disability to gain more time with family and friends, greater independence, access to new skills, jobs, or volunteering in their community, and an improved quality of life. The NDIS also connects anyone with disability to services in their community. For more information about the NDIS visit <https://www.ndis.gov.au/>.

## Insurance

Ensure your organisation has the appropriate insurance in place to protect all volunteers. Not all insurance providers are alike, so you might like to contact a range of providers to get the insurance coverage that meets your organisation's needs. Further advice and resources regarding insurance can be found via Justice Connect's website <https://www.nfplaw.org.au/free-resources/insurance-and-risk>.



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# Resources

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## NSW Volunteer Charter

The NSW Volunteer Charter is a set of 10 guiding principles that encourage best practice, good communication and positive relationships. It supports the foundations for a good volunteer experience and gives individuals, groups, and organisations the opportunity to express their support for the spirit of volunteering while upholding the principles of good volunteer practice. The NSW Volunteer Charter can be found on the NSW Government's Volunteering page <https://www.nsw.gov.au/community-services/volunteering/resources-for-volunteering-nsw/nsw-volunteer-charter>.

## NSW Women's Strategy 2023-2026

Research shows that people with disability have higher retention and attendance rates in the workplace. However, women with disability also experience lower rates of workforce participation (51%) compared to men with disability (56%). The NSW Women's Strategy 2023-2026 vision is that *all women and girls live and work in a safe and fair society where they are treated with respect and dignity. All women and girls have equitable access to services, resources, opportunities, and protections that enable them to thrive.*

The Strategy aims to advance women's economic opportunities and social equality, and end violence against women and girls, including women and girls with disability. More information about the Strategy can be found at this website <https://www.nsw.gov.au/women-nsw/nsw-womens-strategy-2023-2026>.

## Reference documents

- Attitude is Everything, Accessible Volunteering Guide <https://attitudeiseverything.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Accessible-Volunteering-Guide-Jan-2023.pdf>
- NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/customer-service/publications-and-reports/disability-inclusion-action-plan>
- Disability Action Plan and Action Plan Guide <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/action-plans-and-action-plan-guides#:~:text=A%20DAP%20is%20a%20document,righ%20of%20people%20with%20disability.>
- Ensuring Occupations are Responsive to People with Disability <https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022-10/2976-acola-disability.pdf>
- Positive community attitudes and behaviours are essential to improving inclusion for people with disability (Five Factors for Effective Policy to Improve Attitudes towards People with Disability, Cambridge University Press) <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/social-policy-and-society/article/five-factors-for-effective-policy-to-improve-attitudes-towards-people-with-disability/471BC04F4F564E410081B7E5D6776F0D>
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/#orientation>
- Choose Inclusion Campaign resources developed for International Day for People with Disability (IDPWD) 2024 <https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/>
- Universal Declaration on Volunteering <https://volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-Universal-Declaration-on-Volunteering.pdf>
- Accessible and inclusive sports facilities, Sports England <https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/accessible-inclusive>

- PWDA Language Guide: A guide to language about disability <https://pwd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/PWDA-Language-Guide-v2-2021.pdf>
- Disability Inclusion: How do we change community attitudes, University of New South Wales <https://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2022/06/disability-inclusion--how-do-we-change-community-attitudes->
- Creating an accessible and inclusive workplace, Australian Human Rights <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/creating-accessible-and-inclusive-workplace>
- National Indigenous Australians Agency <https://www.niaa.gov.au/2023-commonwealth-closing-gap-implementation-plan/cross-cutting-areas/disability>
- Accessibility and Inclusion in Outdoor Education and Recreation, Sport NZ, <https://sportnz.org.nz/about/news-and-media/news-updates/new-guide-accessibility-and-inclusion-in-the-outdoors/>
- Co-design, NZ Sport <https://sportnz.org.nz/co-design/co-design/>

## Useful websites

- Australian Disability Network <https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/>
- Public Service Commission <https://www.psc.nsw.gov.au/culture-and-inclusion/disability-employment>
- Intopia Digital <https://intopia.digital/>
- The Centre for Volunteering <https://www.volunteering.com.au/>

## Legislation and Standards

- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A04426/latest/text>
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1997 (NSW) <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1977-048>
- National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 (Commonwealth) <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/governance/legislation>

- World Wide Web Access: Disability Discrimination Act Advisory Notes 2014 <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/world-wide-web-access-disability-discrimination-act-advisory-notes-ver>
- Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW) <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-2014-041>
- Disability Services and Inclusion Act 2023 <https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/disability-services-and-inclusion-act-2023>
- The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/nationalstandards/>
- Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth) <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A03712/latest/versions>

For more information about the NSW Disability Inclusion Volunteering Guidelines, please visit the NSW Volunteering website at [www.nsw.gov.au/volunteering](http://www.nsw.gov.au/volunteering).

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