How to Attract, Retain, and Celebrate Volunteers and Sponsors

# 1. Introduction

Volunteers and sponsors are the heartbeat of community organisations. Drawing from over two decades of experience, Kelly Howlett shares practical, tested strategies that have helped Care for Hedland thrive in the Pilbara. This guide is designed to help you build a vibrant, sustainable volunteer and sponsorship culture.

# 2. Attracting Volunteers

## 2.1. Make Your Presence Known

### Use six different communication channels

People are busy and distracted. Kelly recommends using at least six different methods to promote your events or programs—such as Facebook, email newsletters, school bulletins, community noticeboards, local MPs, and council websites. This increases the chance your message will be seen.

Don’t rely on one platform  
  
For example, if you only post on Facebook, you miss those who don’t use it. Diversify your outreach to include physical flyers, local radio, and even word-of-mouth at community events.

Engage in public consultation  
  
Submit feedback on local government proposals as your organisation. This raises your visibility and shows you're active in civic life.

## 2.2. Lower the Barriers to Entry

Let people “walk alongside”  
  
New volunteers may feel intimidated. Kelly suggests buddying them with experienced volunteers so they can learn by doing, even if they only have an hour to spare.  
  
Be inclusive of short-term help  
  
Someone who can only help for 30 minutes is still valuable. They may become long-term supporters or ambassadors.  
  
Provide what they need  
  
Offer hats, water, PPE, or transport. These small gestures make participation easier and more welcoming.

## 2.3. Tap Into Existing Networks

Use volunteer platforms  
  
Post opportunities on:  
- Volunteering WA: https://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/  
- SEEK Volunteer: https://www.volunteer.com.au/  
- Act Belong Commit: https://www.actbelongcommit.org.au/  
  
Host open days or sundowners  
  
These informal gatherings help people meet your team and learn about your work in a relaxed setting.  
  
Check for corporate volunteering policies

Many companies have staff volunteering programs. Reach out to HR departments or check their websites.

# 3. Retaining Volunteers

## 3.1. Be Flexible

Adapt to modern time constraints  
  
Long volunteering days are less feasible now. Offer short, well-organised shifts that fit around work and family life.  
  
Accommodate different schedules  
  
For example, turtle monitoring at Care for Hedland includes late-night shifts that suit university students.  
  
Provide transport and accommodation  
  
Kelly’s team billets volunteers with local families, especially those coming from out of town.

## 3.2. Recognise and Celebrate

Certificates and awards  
  
Kelly gives certificates for everything—Clean Up Australia Day, turtle monitoring, National   
  
Volunteer Week. People love them and often share them on social media.  
  
Track and share hours  
  
Families even compete to see who has volunteered the most. This gamification builds pride and engagement.  
  
Create traditions  
  
Wooden trophies and plaques with names engraved become cherished symbols of contribution.

## 3.3. Foster Belonging

Build community  
  
Post-event coffees or breakfasts help volunteers bond and feel part of something bigger.  
Communicate regularly  
Share updates on project progress, outcomes, and upcoming events. Volunteers want to see the impact of their work.  
  
Avoid burnout  
Check in with volunteers. Encourage rest and rotate responsibilities to prevent overwork.

# 4. Engaging Young People

## 4.1. Make It Family-Friendly

Encourage whole-family participation  
Activities like Christmas wrapping or beach cleanups are great for all ages.  
  
Have clear junior volunteer policies  
Care for Hedland allows children over 9 to volunteer independently with parental consent. Under 9s must be accompanied.

## 4.2. Partner with Schools and Youth Groups

Get in early  
Schools plan their terms in advance. Reach out early to secure a spot.  
Offer placements and talks  
Kelly’s team gives presentations at high schools, which often leads to students requesting placements.  
  
Engage homeschool networks  
These families are often eager to participate in community-based learning.

## 4.3. Offer Real-World Value

Provide skill-building opportunities  
Let young people learn data entry, public speaking, or environmental monitoring.  
  
Be flexible with timing  
Teens may prefer afternoon or evening activities. Work with their schedules.

# 5. Attracting and Managing Sponsors

## 5.1. Think Beyond Cash

In-kind support is powerful  
A donated skip bin or marquee can be more valuable than a cheque. Recognise these contributions as sponsorships.  
  
Offer tiered packages  
Bronze, Silver, Gold, and custom options allow businesses of all sizes to contribute.

## 5.2. Deliver on Promises

Follow through  
If you promise a logo on a flyer or a speaking role, make sure it happens. If something goes wrong, communicate and offer alternatives.  
  
Be transparent  
Kelly shares how she once missed a media mention and made up for it with a special poster run.

## 5.3. Celebrate Sponsors Publicly

Use plaques and certificates  
Kelly’s $80 engraved plaques are proudly displayed in council buildings and offices. They’re a small cost for a big impact.  
  
Include them in events  
Invite sponsors to present awards, attend school talks, or join cleanups.

# 6. Fundraising and Sustainability

## 6.1. Diversify Income

Memberships and donations  
Keep fees low and accessible. Encourage members to donate time and money.  
  
Creative fundraising  
Host raffles, quiz nights, or offer paid experiences like turtle tours—even out of season.  
  
Containers for Change  
Register your group to receive donated containers. Promote your code widely.

## 6.2. Build Partnerships

Collaborate with other groups  
Kelly’s Repair Café involves the RSL, Men’s Shed, and Masonic Lodge. Each brings unique strengths.  
  
Leverage employment programs  
Partner with CDP providers or ranger programs to support job seekers and gain volunteers.  
Apply for DGR status  
This allows you to offer tax-deductible receipts for donations. It’s paperwork-heavy but worth it.

# 7. Final Thoughts

Keep trying  
Engagement fluctuates. Some months are quiet, others are booming. That’s normal.  
  
Welcome new people  
Fresh energy and ideas keep your group alive. Be open to change.  
  
Use technology  
Transitioning from paper to tablets for turtle monitoring made the program more appealing to young people.  
  
Always improve  
Ask for feedback. Offer incentives like gift cards to boost survey responses.

# Appendix: Useful Links and Resources

## Volunteer Recruitment & Support

- Volunteering WA: https://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/  
- SEEK Volunteer: https://www.volunteer.com.au/  
- Act Belong Commit: https://www.actbelongcommit.org.au/  
- Town Team Movement: https://www.townteammovement.com/  
- Volunteering Australia: https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/

## Fundraising & Sponsorship

- Containers for Change WA: https://www.containersforchange.com.au/wa/  
- Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC): https://www.acnc.gov.au/  
- ATO DGR Information: https://www.ato.gov.au/Non-profit/Getting-started/In-detail/Types-of-DGRs/

## Youth Engagement

- Headspace: https://headspace.org.au/  
- Mission Australia Youth Services: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/youth