



Recruiting and retaining members

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Landcare groups. Attracting and keeping members for your group as well as volunteers who may only be involved in a single project is a key task. Making sure they are all happy and motivated will increase your group's effectiveness and ultimate success.

This Landcare Note looks at ways you can recruit and retain members and involve all types of volunteers.

What volunteer involvement is

As Landcare groups are volunteer organisations (see Landcare Note 9.2: Managing Volunteers), having active volunteers is vital to getting things done.

Recruiting more members to build up your group is important to maintaining the group itself, and the work you are doing.

You need to recruit new members to broaden your membership and promote your important social AND environmental roles. You also want to involve community members in your local area and attract a range of people with a variety of skills who can contribute to your work. Some people may only be involved in a one-off situation, but they also make a vital contribution.

Why people might be interested in being part of your group

Landcare groups have a well-known purpose and a grassroots philosophy and it's widely recognised that they are established for local community benefit.

There are opportunities to be involved in specific fields that are attractive to potential volunteers. The social benefit of being involved with people with similar interests is also a reason that people get involved.

For many there is personal satisfaction from doing something worthwhile, while active involvement can also increase self-esteem and self-confidence.

Members may want to learn more about their local area and environmental problems, and what can be done about them. They may also want to make a contribution to raising awareness of environmental values and be part of the conservation and rehabilitation of natural resources for future generations to enjoy.

How to do it

An integral part of a volunteer recruitment program is understanding the rewards people want to gain if they're involved.

Community groups have to be smart about the ways they can keep their membership strong. Potential members are out there so your members need to actively use their own community networks and not be afraid to ask more people to join up or get involved in a specific project.

What do people need to know?

If people are going to join you, they will want to know what you are planning to do. Your group has to have meaning for them and their own needs and goals, so what are you offering? What are the benefits of being involved?

Who are your potential members?

What is your local community interested in and who are those people? They are your target audience. Once you understand who your target audience is, think about ways you can tell them about your group and your activities. Think about the different types of people who may be interested in getting involved, and the different approaches you might need to engage with them.



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Have a membership plan

Draw up a plan for recruiting new members so all members know and understand the group's approach. Each member has opportunities to recruit new members so ask them to actively promote what you are doing. You might also want to think about ways you can let people know that you are seeking new members.

There are other things you might want to consider when you begin your membership 'drive' such as:

- Linking your activities to other events and contemporary issues
- Having a diverse range of ways that members can contribute to the group and interesting things for people to become involved with
- Having a list of the group's activities and associated tasks may help attract people with various skills – anything from revegetation and fencing through to site assessment and surveying, report writing, newsletter writing, arranging publicity and fundraising, website development and administration tasks.

Make sure the membership process is easy. This can be in terms of getting a membership form, sending it back and making the appropriate payment, and coordinate the membership drive or renewal with another event, such as part of your Annual General Meeting (AGM). Also remember to communicate with new members and get feedback from them about how they are going. For tips see Landcare Note 9.2: Managing Volunteers.

Publicise volunteer opportunities

Promote your group through phone trees, local media and via word of mouth. You can also spread the message through community hubs such as local schools, service organisations, libraries, local government offices and community gatherings such as seniors groups

or Scout groups, see Landcare Note 6.5: Working with the Media.

A regular newsletter sent to members and available to other interested people in the community promotes your group and its activities, keeps your members up-to-date, and provides information to a wider audience. Consider posting the newsletter to a range of people who could promote your group to others as the opportunity arises or who might be interested in getting involved in a specific project. A newsletter is also a useful tool to hand out at events when you would like to attract new members.

Refer to Landcare Note 6.6: How to Market Your Group Successfully, for some other ideas about promoting your group but remember, once you have members, it's important to keep them.

Retaining members

- Be organised when you hold activities and meetings.
- Make sure you remember to welcome people when they attend an event or meeting.
- Create a list of different tasks to be done and delegate these to members so everyone has something to do.
- Remember to appreciate and recognise people and what they do for the group.
- Provide a variety of activities throughout the year to keep it fun and interesting.
- Try to identify realistic goals and tasks for your group so members get a sense of achievement.
- Remember most people volunteer for the social contact, so provide a social aspect to your activities.



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Key tools

Some key tools for recruiting and retaining volunteers include:

- A membership form that is easily accessible and kept up-to-date
- A flyer, brochure or regular newsletter that provides information on what you do
- A group plan for what you will do to attract new members and keep them
- Enlist all group members to help attract new members and keep them happy
- Register and promote your group with a range of organisations so they can pass on your details to potential volunteers. Consider your local CMA, local government office, on the Volunteering Australia *GoVolunteer* website, Our Community website and the Victorian Landcare gateway website.

Further references

Victorian Landcare gateway:
www.landcarevic.org.au

Volunteering Australia:
<http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/>

Victoria's Volunteering Portal
<http://www.volunteer.vic.gov.au/>

Related Landcare Notes

This Landcare Note is one of a series. These notes provide an excellent guide for the ongoing operation of your group.

Landcare Note 6.5: Working with the Media

Landcare Note 6.6: How to Market Your Group Successfully

Landcare Note 9.2: Managing Volunteers

Acknowledgements

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