

# Booming Recruiting:

## An Action Research Project



Department for Community Development  
Government of Western Australia  
Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering





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# Minister's Foreword

I have great pleasure in presenting *Booming Recruiting: An Action Research Project*, a publication prepared by the Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering, designed to harness the tremendous resource and capability of Western Australia's 428,600 volunteers.

It is the culmination of almost three years of research to devise and test strategies that will assist organisations in recruiting volunteers and encourage more Western Australians to volunteer.

*Booming Recruiting: An Action Research Project* is the product of much intense research and collaboration.

It reflects the State Government's commitment outlined in the *Valuing Volunteers* policy document to providing and promoting recognition and practical support for volunteering across the sector.

This publication would not have been possible without the commitment and active participation of the many managers of volunteers, volunteers and organisations who willingly gave their time, experience and energy to design, develop and trial a range of recruitment strategies.

I also acknowledge the excellent work of Dr Judy Esmond Ph.D, Principal Consultant, Team Consultants in bringing this project to fruition.

I commend this booklet to all volunteering organisations and I am sure it will be a practical and extremely useful resource in the ongoing training and recruitment of volunteers.



Hon Sheila M McHale MLA  
Minister with Responsibility for Volunteering

# Booming Recruiting Stage Three of An Action Research Project

## Where It All Began!

This booklet is the result of a nine-month action research project entitled *Booming Recruiting: An Action Research Project*, commissioned by Volunteering Secretariat, Department for Community Development, Western Australia. Booming Recruiting was Stage Three of a three part project and, as with previous stages, was undertaken by Dr Judy Esmond, Ph.D.

Stage One of the overall project explored what Baby Boomers were looking for in volunteering in the report entitled *BOOMNET: Capturing the Baby Boomer Volunteers*.

Stage Two examined if and how organisations were recruiting these Baby Boomer volunteers in the report entitled *From BOOMNET to BOOMNOT*.

Stage Three built upon the findings of the two previous research reports and provided the rare opportunity to turn research into action. *Booming Recruiting: An Action Research Project* aimed to identify, trial and implement recruitment ideas and strategies to recruit both Baby Boomer volunteers and other volunteers into a range of organisations.

The project involved a series of six one-day workshops and supportive coaching by Dr Esmond during 2003/2004 for a number of managers of volunteers who were selected from their expressions of interest. They trialled a range of recruiting ideas and strategies within their organisations. Collectively, these managers of volunteers were involved with over 13,000 volunteers. The final 21 organisations that participated in this project from September 2003 to May 2004 were:

Anglicare WA

Australian Red Cross (WA)

City of Stirling, Community Services Department

Coalition for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees (CARAD)

Churches of Christ Homes & Community Services

Department of Sport & Recreation, Seniors Recreation Council of WA

Guides Western Australia

Mandurah Home & Community Care

Men of the Trees

Mensplace

Office of Seniors Interests & Volunteering

RSPCA WA

Rocky Bay

School Volunteer Program (WA)

Starlight Children's Foundation

Southcare

St Johns Ambulance, Volunteer First Aid Service

Trinity Learning Centre for teenage mums

Volunteering Western Australia

Wesley Do Care

Women's Healthworks

# How To Use This Booklet

This booklet is primarily a 'how to' guide containing many ideas, tips and strategies on recruiting volunteers from the experiences of the managers involved in this project. There are four main steps outlined in the booklet: goal-setting; big picture fundamentals; follow the Baby Boomers; and practical recruiting ideas. It is not intended to provide all the answers but to 'spark' more of your own ideas to enhance your volunteer recruiting to an absolutely booming level!

## Step 1: Setting Those Goals – What Works!

*The achievement of your goal is assured the moment you commit yourself to it.*

*Mack R. Douglas*

One of the major features of this action research project was that all managers of volunteers identified and worked towards a number of recruitment goals. These goals were the focus of their recruitment plans and efforts over the nine-month period. The great majority of participants achieved their recruitment goals by the end of the project and all organisations increased their volunteer pool, with some organisations increasing their total number of volunteers by up to 25%.

The goal setting process formed the basis of the successful volunteer recruitment plans. To achieve effective goal setting, start with the S.M.A.R.T formula devised by the Franklin Covey organisation.



### **S.M.A.R.T GOALS are:**

**S**pecific – defining precisely the objectives or outcomes you want to achieve

**M**easurable - defining how you will know when you've attained the outcomes

**A**ction-oriented - using action verbs to describe the steps required

**R**ealistic – confirming that you believe the goal is really possible

**T**imely – setting a deadline for reaching your goal

Next, to achieve your identified S.M.A.R.T goals, you need to add the 'action' process comprising of three parts:

1. Planning the recruiting work and then working the plan.
2. Monitoring progress, comparing progressive measured results against original goals and reviewing goals periodically.
3. Revising and adapting the strategies to achieve the goals. Determining what is working and what isn't and implementing the revised plan.

# What Doesn't Work!

In this action research project, managers of volunteers found that the goal setting process was not successful if the:

1. ***Goals are very vague and non-specific.*** When goals are too general there is no way to measure how they are going to be achieved.
2. ***Goals are unrealistic and no different to previous strategies.*** Setting a goal of doubling the number of volunteers in the organisation by using the same old recruitment strategies that were previously unsuccessful makes that goal both unrealistic and unattainable.
3. ***Goals rely on other organisations or groups to make changes*** in order to be achieved. Goals that rely totally on outside intervention such as greater involvement by other organisations or more funding, reduce control over those goals and therefore the ability to obtain successful outcomes.
4. ***Goals focus purely on revising written material*** (e.g., brochures and posters) as a major method of volunteer recruitment. Written materials are 'passive' recruitment techniques that need to be but a part of an 'active' package of recruitment strategies in order to be successful.
6. ***Goals are dependent on the manager of volunteers trying to do more in less time.*** Recruitment strategies that require the manager of volunteers to do it all – working harder and faster – are unlikely to succeed and can result in burnout.

# Step 2: Big Picture Fundamentals

*If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost, that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.*

*Henry David Thoreau*

In order for goal setting to be successful and practical recruiting strategies to be effective, there are certain fundamentals that need to be considered in any volunteer recruitment plan. These form the basis of your recruitment plan – the overall ‘Big Picture’. Here are nine fundamentals that were identified by managers of volunteers during the action research project:

## **1. Test for the Best in an Ongoing Process**

- Develop a coordinated approach to volunteer recruitment. It needs to be more than just a recruitment drive every six months - it is an on-going process. Be prepared to test, test and test your ideas again. Never just rely on one recruitment strategy alone and have a range of strategies. Be aware what worked in the past may not work in the future. If an idea doesn't work, try something else. Be innovative, be creative and be bold!

## **2. Do Your Research**

- Update your database and find out more about the demographic profile of your current volunteers. Then research and get feedback from your volunteers on what works, what doesn't and what could be improved in terms of recruiting.
- Research and discover what other organisations are doing to recruit volunteers. Sharing ideas can open up possibilities you may not have thought of before now.
- Talk with others in your organisation involved with volunteers to develop strategies and use your collective knowledge.

### **3. All for One and One for All**

- Raise the profile of volunteers with the management committee or executive. Keep them up-to-date with volunteer concerns and have volunteer issues on the meeting agenda.
- Ensure that management and other paid staff in the organisation are supportive of volunteers. Volunteer recruitment is everyone's concern at every level within the organisation.

### **4. Policies and Procedures – Remove the Barriers**

- Examine all the policies and procedures in your organisation. If they are 'barriers' to successful volunteer recruitment then work to remove them.
- Reduce the paperwork – the more pieces of paper, the more complicated the processes and the smaller the number of volunteers.

### **5. Convert the Unconverted**

- Develop strategies to follow up on all enquiries about volunteering and increase your conversion rate from potential to actual volunteers – don't let them get away that easily! Ring back, write back or call in but prompt follow up is essential to convert the yet unconverted prospects into committed volunteers.

### **6. Create Collaboration**

- Develop strategies to work with other organisations in recruiting volunteers. Discover the power of networking and develop joint projects to enrich the volunteer experience so volunteers may experience a range of volunteer activities across a number of organisations. Competition can be a barrier that results in duplication of services and often creates confusion for potential volunteers. Lower the drawbridge and invite creative collaboration in.

## 7. Share It Around

- Share the load around. Any recruitment plan based solely on the efforts of the manager of volunteers is heading along the path to burnout. Aim to develop recruitment strategies that involve others – you don't have to do it all. Select a team of 'recruiter' volunteers, whose only duties are to develop and implement an effective volunteer recruitment program.



## 8. Trendspotting into the Future

- Be aware of the trends that are affecting volunteering now and into the future. If you can predict the future you can plan in the present. Spot the trends and respond to them and you will have those volunteers joining up rather than drying up.
- Here are some volunteering trends identified in the project to get you thinking:
  - **On-line volunteering** – as more people go on-line the opportunity to volunteer at a distance without having to leave their home or office is becoming an increasingly attractive way to make a contribution.
  - **Corporate volunteering** – companies are looking for opportunities for their employees to volunteer. It is the movement from the giving of money to the giving of time. Volunteering is good for teamwork, good for staff morale, good for business and a way to give something back to the local community.
  - **Family volunteering** – as the pressures of life place greater demands on people's time, volunteering with your family allows time to both volunteer and spend time together as a family.
  - **Short-term volunteering** – led by the time-poor Baby Boomers, volunteers are increasingly looking for opportunities to contribute in a short-term, time-limited way without long-term commitment. However, remember if they enjoy the experience they may come back again and again for further assignments.

## 9. Think BIG and Have Fun!

- Think big but take small and manageable steps along the way. Take care of the fundamentals and you are on the way to booming recruiting success.
- Most of all enjoy the journey and have fun!

# Step 3: Follow The Baby Boomers

*The Baby Boomers are our greatest potential pool of volunteers, their sheer size makes them an awesome force and they will set the trends in volunteering. Follow the Baby Boomers and you will see into the future.*

*Judy Esmond*

Here are *five* key points identified by managers of volunteers during this action research project for specifically recruiting Baby Boomers as volunteers:

## **1. Understand the Baby Boomers**

- Gain an understanding of the Baby Boomers and what they are looking for from volunteering by reading the BOOMNET Report. As Baby Boomers are re-examining their lives, their mindset often moves from seeking success to seeking significance. They have often been successful in their careers, and now they also want their lives to be significant. Challenging, interesting volunteering opportunities that 'make a difference' are ways that Baby Boomers can significantly contribute back to the community.

## **2. Sell the Benefits**

- Recognise the needs of the volunteer. There is a lot of competition out there for the time and attention of Baby Boomers, so you need to sell the benefits and attractions of volunteering, so that they will want to 'buy' your volunteering experience.

### **3. Be Flexible**

- Be flexible. Revise those volunteer job descriptions and the selection interview processes. Customise the volunteer opportunities around the volunteer rather than trying to fit them into the standard job description. Be open to Baby Boomers bringing skills that you hadn't planned on. Adapt and combine the needs, skills and interests that your Baby Boomer volunteer brings with them with what your organisation needs. Don't lose them just because they don't fit with how you usually utilise volunteers.

### **4. Go Headhunting**

- Need a particular volunteer with certain skills and expertise? Don't wait around hoping they will come to you - go head hunting. Identify the 'skills set' needed and go find that volunteer who you need, e.g., in public relations, policy writing or journalism. But be very clear about what you are asking them to do and stress that they are exactly what you are looking for.

### **5. Watch the Clock**

- Be aware that Baby Boomers feel 'time poor' – they do not feel they have enough time to do everything that is part of their busy lives. Develop one-off or other short-term volunteering opportunities that are time limited. If they enjoy the experience, they are more likely to return again and again for further short term projects.
- Look at the time commitments currently asked of your volunteers and adapt them where possible. Try to suit the needs of whatever time the Baby Boomers can offer you in their hectic lives.

# Step 4: Practical Recruiting Ideas For Baby Boomers And Other Volunteers

*The road to success is always under construction.*

*Jim Miller*

In this action research project, a great many recruiting ideas were tested and implemented by the managers of volunteers in their own organisations. It seems that a wide range of recruiting techniques do have the potential to be successful, but it is often how they are implemented that can make the difference. From this process and the past experiences of the managers of volunteers involved in this project, we can present a number of practical ideas to consider when recruiting *all* volunteers:

## **1. Advertising Power**

- Compile a great volunteer information pack for all enquiries about volunteering. First impressions count, so it will need to be easy to understand, interesting to read and provide answers to the most frequently asked questions from potential volunteers. If you are not sure what those questions are, then ask your current volunteers what would have been the most useful information for them when they joined up.
- Critically review all your written advertising. Brochures, flyers, posters work best if they are well designed with greater use of colour, pictures, catchy headings and have a short, sharp message about the benefits of volunteering.

- Having the best looking written material won't help if you don't put it in the 'right' place. Before placing your brochures, flyers and posters, find out the demographics of the people who frequent those locations. Target the market you want. For example, libraries tend to attract an older group of volunteers, while university notice-boards have a younger adult age group. How's this for target marketing? One animal welfare organisation places its volunteering advertising in veterinarians' offices and pet supply stores.
- Have the volunteering message on everything – bumper stickers, bookmarks and volunteer badges and t-shirts. Take the opportunity to spread your message far and wide. One organisation now has its volunteering bumper stickers on its fleet of over 100 vans that travel around the community each day. Also, their volunteers selling raffle tickets in shopping centres now have t-shirts that say 'ask me about volunteering'. The volunteering message is now on their 'messages on hold' phonelines and when telemarketing for donations, if the person is not interested in donating money they are now asked if they would be interested in volunteering. Another organisation includes a section to tick on its donation mail-out forms if people might like to volunteer. Yet another organisation has recruited local businesses to insert a volunteer recruitment flyer in the bag with any purchases customers make.
- Use the Volunteer Resource Centres – Twenty Volunteer Resource Centres exist in small and large communities across Western Australia including the State wide service Volunteering WA. Make yourself known to them and use the Centres to the best advantage. Their contact details are listed on the Volunteering Secretariat's website – [www.volunteering.communitydevelopment.wa.gov.au](http://www.volunteering.communitydevelopment.wa.gov.au).

## 2. Manage the Media

- The local community papers seem to be more successful for recruiting local volunteers than the major newspapers. All households receive one and most people read their local paper. Rather than paying for advertising aim to have an article about your organisation published.
- Ring the paper and find out the type of stories they are looking for. The most successful recruiting articles are human interest, success stories or awards that talk about volunteers in the organisation and have a great photograph. Always include a phone number to ring if people are interested in volunteering at the end of the story.
- Get on the radio and talk about volunteering, particularly recruiting for large events. But make sure that you know the demographics of the audience of that radio station before you do – if you are looking for younger volunteers be aware that certain radio stations will have an older listening audience.
- Take the chance to look at all sorts of publications to get your volunteering message out but remember who you are targeting. Have A Go Newspaper, Intersector Magazine and school newsletters have all been successful recruitment sources for organisations.

## 3. Now for the Big Event

- Consider a stall at the local fair. Again you need to understand the demographic profile of people attending the fair before your organisation decides to attend. But make that stall interesting and exciting. Have your volunteers and staff with the best ‘people skills’ on the stall so they can connect with potential volunteers. The wrong people on the right stall can drive away more potential volunteers than you can imagine.

- Don't just wait for the people to come to you - get a few of your 'people orientated' volunteers out and about handing out brochures and talking to people around the fair and directing them to your stall.
- Reconsider shopping centre displays. People are mostly there to shop and not to stop. Displays require a lot of time and effort and are good for educating people about your organisation but not always successful for attracting volunteers.

#### **4. Public Speaking – Blow Your Own Trumpet**

- Consider a range of public speaking opportunities to promote volunteering for your organisation including service clubs and corporate organisations. Make sure you know the audience and make sure that your best public speaker is doing the speaking – hand pick the person to blow the trumpet – how well they speak can determine how interested the audience will become in volunteering for your organisation.

#### **5. Get on the Internet**

- Recruiting volunteers over the internet is a growth area, especially for once-off events. Get your volunteering details on other sites. It is free and easy to do and many potential volunteers are increasingly checking out these sites. Get listed at GoVolunteer ([www.govolunteer.com](http://www.govolunteer.com)), a valuable Australian volunteering site and SEEK ([www.seek.com.au](http://www.seek.com.au)) which has a dedicated section for volunteering opportunities for those also looking for paid employment.
- Don't forget your own site. Make sure your volunteering opportunities are clearly detailed on your own website. Listing on other sites usually involves links back to your organisation's own site too.

## 6. The Power of Word of Mouth Recruiting

- Word of mouth is still the number one recruitment method of all time. But as Steve McCurley and Sue Vineyard in their volunteer recruitment book point out: "if you don't ask people can't say...yes". Aim for everyone in your organisation to become part of your word of mouth strategy and personally ask everyone they know and meet about volunteering. Or target the volunteers with the best people skills to ask others as part of your word of mouth team.
- There are countless ways to use the power of word of mouth to recruit even more volunteers. Several organisations have regular 'bring a friend' events where friends are often 'converted' to volunteers. Another organisation offers a double movie pass as a prize when a young person brings an adult along as a potential volunteer leader. Yet another organisation has 'ask a mate' week – when all volunteers ask their mates about becoming volunteers.



- Remember to combine word of mouth recruiting with other strategies. People tend to ask other people who are like themselves, so if this is your *only* recruitment strategy, you may end up with cliques and a lack of diversity amongst your volunteers.

## **7. Networking Know How**

- Aim to use networking as part of your recruitment plan and watch the opportunities grow. Establish relationships, network with and utilize other organisations in your recruiting quest. There are boundless opportunities to create synergies, develop pilot projects, break-down the barriers and recruit volunteers that you may have never thought of before, by utilising a process of cross-referral of volunteer skills and experience.
- Maintain contact with the traditional volunteer sources – Volunteering WA, other Volunteer Resource Centres, Retirees WA, TAFEs, Universities and Centrelink - with a personal touch. Also look beyond to other networks both in and outside the non-profit sector.

## **8. Hitting the Target**

- With all these practical recruiting suggestions, remember that your recruiting will be even more successful if you target market. If you want to recruit a particular group based on gender, profession, trade or life-stage don't always use the same recruiting approach in the belief that 'one size fits all'. What may attract Baby Boomers to volunteer may not be the same for younger volunteers. Do the research to understand your target group - how to access them, what they want from volunteering and whether your organisation is the right 'fit'. Time spent in this planning will help you to hit the target every time and recruit more volunteers than ever before!

# A Final Word

*It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.*

*Ursula K. LeGuin*

This nine-month action research project has been an incredible journey on the road of recruiting Baby Boomers and other volunteers. We hope that some of the ideas, tips and strategies presented in this booklet will help you on your way to booming recruiting success!

# Further Reading

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