



Attracting and Retaining P&C Volunteers



Attracting volunteers is a perennial problem for P&Cs.

Introduction

Each year, WACSSO's affiliated P&C Associations go through the process of seeking and/or keeping volunteers.

P&C volunteers fulfill a range of roles, from leadership positions on the P&C Executive to event volunteers and everything in between. The two things all P&Cs have in common are a commitment to community and fear that they won't have enough volunteers to complete all their planned activities and projects.

In response to this fear, and due to it being one of the major areas on which our P&Cs seek support and advice, WACSSO initiated a research project to determine how best to attract and retain volunteers. Funded by Volunteering WA and completed in partnership with Murdoch University, the findings of this project are captured in this resource.

WACSSO thanks and acknowledges the research team at Murdoch University, Dr Megan Paull and Dr Katherine Sugars, in completing the fieldwork and report for this project. WACSSO also thanks the Research Committee at Volunteering WA for funding this important project. Last, but not least, WACSSO thanks all the current, past and prospective P&C volunteers who gifted their time and told their stories to inform this research. It is the stories of our affiliates that inform, direct and make real the findings of this research.



WACSSO thanks and acknowledges our partners:



The Four Dimensions of Volunteering

There is no singular solution for building a pool of volunteers; there are countless solutions.

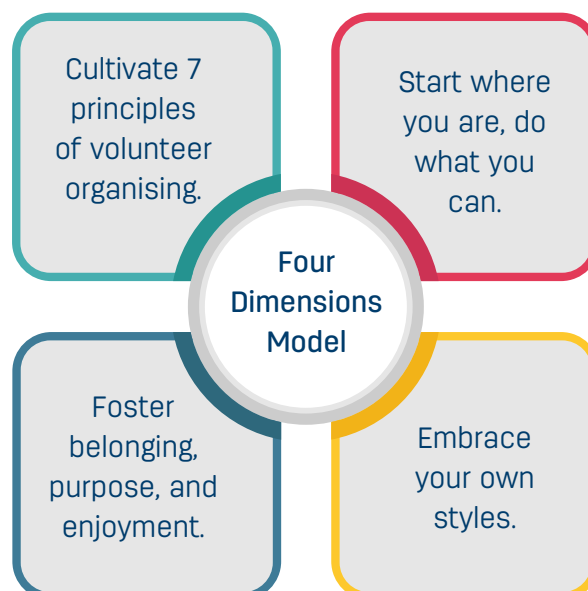
Our research showed that, like most organisations, there is no singular top-down, best practice, or simple solution for building a pool of volunteers. The model for success that emerged from the research identifies **four dimensions of volunteering**. It is based on an empowering, knowledge sharing, and knowledge building approach to problem solving and capacity building.

The four dimensions model is designed around two central ideas.

1. P&Cs operate in their own way in their own unique—and evolving—situation. Also, P&C members looking for help are sometimes in formal leader positions and sometimes not. To match the diversity of situations, the model is flexible by design—helpful for anyone, in any situation, at any time.
2. Members of P&Cs with large or growing volunteer pools spoke about strengths or improvements they made in four common areas—these became the model's four dimensions.

This model is designed to be enduring, flexible, and accessible. It is useful for the many different operating models of our P&Cs. It can assist P&Cs in seeking and keeping volunteers, by allowing them to generate and consider a range of actions they can take to boost membership and diversity.

We encourage proactive P&Cs aiming to gather, diversify, or nurture their volunteers to consider each of the four dimensions. Using the dimensions as a guide, you can create your own customised set of actions to boost membership and diversity.



Dimension One: The 7 Principles of P&C Volunteer Organising



Each principle is interconnected, so improving one - or several in combination - can affect others in a positive way; gains from a single change will be multiple and self-reinforcing.



WACSSO encourages P&Cs to celebrate and build on what they do well. Once the Executive Committee has settled into the year - or when obstacles to progress are unclear - it is worthwhile considering the 7 principles of P&C volunteer organising, and brainstorming ways to make progress or uncover a breakthrough idea.

P&Cs in the study that were functioning well - and had healthy volunteer rosters - were consciously or unconsciously applying the 7 principles of P&C volunteer organising.

1

Have a volunteering mindset

Give time generously; make volunteering easy and fun; share the load.

2

Connect People

Build a community; foster a sense of belonging; aim for diverse representation and inclusivity.

3

Know your P&C's core purpose

Enrich students' school experiences; be a valued part of the school community.

4

Achieve shared goals

Listen to families; coordinate events; fundraise; provide services.

5

Be welcoming and fun

Build a positive culture; be open to new ideas and new people; work as a team; manage conflict and cliques.

6

Be organised and communicate

Use transparent processes; maintain records and meet reporting obligations; capture and share knowledge; coordinate tasks; expand communication modes and networks.

7

Realise your potential

Share power and responsibility; govern ethically; harness diversity; act as leaders; support each other.



To reflect on how your P&C is progressing in the 7 principles dimension, sit down with the team and take a look at these questions. Plus add your own!

☐

Are we flexible about volunteer contributions, and do we appreciate our volunteers?

☐

Do we create volunteering opportunities and run events that are fun and include everyone?

☐

Do we focus our efforts on the needs and interests of our families?

☐

Would our P&C benefit from assessing how it achieves its purpose (as defined by the Constitution)?

☐

Do we do things in an organised way (mostly)?

☐

When we are together, does it feel good? Does everyone feel welcome, included, and safe at our meetings and events?

☐

Do we balance clear formal structures with people-friendly processes and staying flexible and open to opportunity?

☐

How did our last event, project, or initiative go? What did we learn, and did we write it down and store it where we can find it for next time?

☐

How do we rate our shared leadership capacity?



Be open
to change
and take
action.

Dimension Two: Start where you are, do what you can

Stories of overcoming challenges told by P&C members follow a consistent pattern. A person or group of people decide they [want change](#), and they [take action](#). The action cycle depicted here came from the research, though you can adapt it or use a different change model. For P&Cs - empirically - these are the important factors:

Start where you are

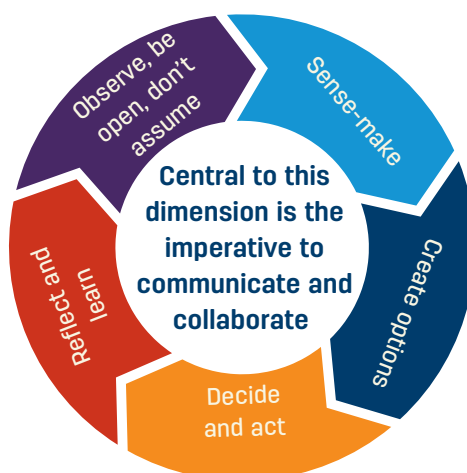
Launching from a point of comfort (starting where you are, not where you think you should be) makes taking steps easier on all members. So, how do you know where you are? Take time on this step, especially if you feel stuck. The less you assume you 'know' and the more you look and listen to different perspectives before jumping in to solve the problem, the more likely it is that you will create realistic, insightful and effective ways to make progress.

Do what you can

Accept your situation. Yes, there will be constraints but there will also be agency and resources — and people with skills, ideas, and energy. Remember to stay positive, don't try to do everything at once, and do it together.

Learn from your experience and build on your progress

The cycle of observing, sensemaking, creating options, acting, and reflecting is a continuous one. Celebrate your wins and learn from them (and from the flops), take a rest, and then jump back in to take advantage of your momentum and an engaged community.



A decorative graphic featuring overlapping circles in blue, pink, and yellow, with arrows indicating a clockwise flow. The background is dark blue with yellow and pink geometric shapes and dotted patterns.

Dimension Three: Embrace your Style

Embracing people who bring different styles to your P&C will increase the number of volunteers.

P&Cs that welcome and foster different styles of leaders, workers, and volunteers will be more successful in seeking and keeping volunteers. Our research highlighted three personal styles that all have an important role to play in P&C volunteering: planners, doers, and relaters.

Planners – like to look at the big picture, see connections, make a plan, and take care of details. They are great at making sure decisions and activities align with goals and purpose, and at keeping everyone on track. There is a good chance they will be the one to initiate change. **(Planners align the team)**

Doers – love to jump in and run an event, or build the adventure playground, or volunteer to take their turn on the barbecue roster. They are invaluable, and having a lot of doers means plans can come to fruition without burning out the committee. Doers can also help planners get the ball rolling - out of the planning stage into the action stage. **(Doers activate the team)**

Relaters – are the glue, the connectors, the mediators, the bridges. Relaters approach new people and help them feel welcome and included. They listen, and they are empathetic. Your relaters are key to a community culture and to collaboration, and they are amazing at recruiting and expanding your volunteer networks. Your planner might design the communication strategy, but your relater will instinctively understand its value. Sometimes you might have to ask them to share their thoughts in a meeting situation. **(Relaters build and take care of the team)**

P&Cs are encouraged to embrace volunteers with each of these styles and consider how to utilise and value them across projects. Seeking out these styles may encourage more diversity in your P&C's capabilities and membership. Involving all styles in P&C idea creation, activities and decision making also helps with future-proofing your P&C Executive; if all styles are welcomed and valued, all members can see themselves in the various roles on offer within a P&C.

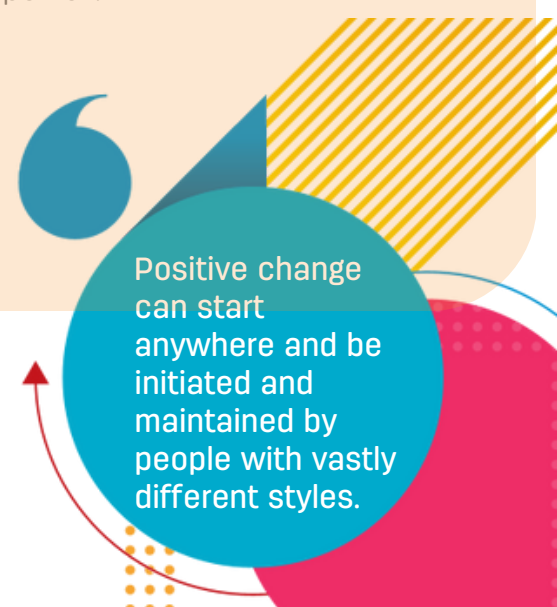
So, the good news is, when individuals embrace their own style of doing things — and value other people's styles — it leads to achieving collective goals, a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere, a diverse group of people, and everyone feeling like they make a difference.

Checklist

Here are some helpful questions to ask at your P&C meetings if you want to delve deeper into Dimensions Two or Three!

- ☐ Do we agree on “where we are now”?
- ☐ What aspects of our current situation would we like to be different?
- ☐ If we have tried a lot of things that don’t seem to be working, could we be making decisions based on faulty assumptions?
- ☐ How can we better understand the motivations and fears of our potential volunteers?
- ☐ If we are stuck (on a decision, in a rut, in a conflict), what agency, resources, and energy do we have to move forwards?
- ☐ Have we been thoughtful and creative in generating options?
- ☐ Do we share decision-making power?
- ☐ Who is going to do what and by when?

- ☐ Do I see myself as a planner, doer, or relater?
- ☐ What role do I play in this committee? (We can adapt our style in different contexts and fill a gap.)
- ☐ Is our committee balanced? Where are the gaps? What about our volunteer roster?
- ☐ Do we actively search out members with different styles?
- ☐ Do we work as a team and value each other’s strengths?
- ☐ Does one person or style dominate our agenda and actions? Would we benefit from a more rounded mixture of perspectives?
- ☐ Do we all take responsibility for the way we work together, what is valued, how we behave, resolving conflicts, and how we share power?



Positive change can start anywhere and be initiated and maintained by people with vastly different styles.

Dimension Four: Belonging, Purpose and Enjoyment

Belonging can
begin the
minute a child
is enrolled.

At the very heart of volunteering on a P&C is belonging, purpose and enjoyment. People are drawn to and stay in P&C communities where these sentiments are authentically demonstrated and felt by members. Additionally, volunteers are less susceptible to burnout when a sense of belonging, purpose, and enjoyment is tangible for them. Remember to ask yourself if you are feeling them too!

Communication about events and volunteering opportunities can explicitly welcome all school community members, tell everyone why the event matters, and encourage them to have fun. If a P&C goal is to increase diversity - or to engage more members of a minority culture in school events - it can help to reconsider what is enjoyable and safe for them, and how you can enable a genuine sense of belonging (ask them).

Remember, the purpose of your P&C is outlined in the Constitution - another good reason to have a copy of this on hand at all meetings! An individual's purpose - the reason they choose to volunteer - is more bespoke and should also be something you check in with on a regular basis.

Here are some questions linked to Dimension 4, plus you might have others to add!

☐

Do I feel like I belong here? Does everyone in the school community feel the same sense of belonging?

☐

Are we proactive about checking in with members at risk of burnout? Do we find ways to lighten their load and help bring the joy back?

☐

Do we have any processes/attitudes that could be unintentionally daunting or upsetting to some people? Can we change them?

☐

Are we having fun? Are other people? Is everyone?

☐

When new people join us, do we listen to their ideas and share decision-making power and responsibility?

☐

Do we value enjoyment and belonging just as much as getting the job done? Do we celebrate our contributions?

☐

Do we make a difference? Does the school community think so?

☐

Do we understand the motivation and purpose driving our volunteers and members?

Summary

01

P&Cs that embed foundational principles of nonprofit and volunteer-led organising (volunteering, community, purpose, objectives, culture, process, and leadership) more readily attract and retain volunteers.

02

Positive change happens when individuals and groups in the community make sense of their current situation, find agency, resources, support and then act.

03

Initiatives by planners, doers and relaters can all be successful, as can teamwork combining different styles.

04

People are drawn to and stay in P&Cs where they feel belonging, purpose, and enjoyment



Volunteers in P&Cs in Western Australia have a wealth of knowledge and experience.



By sharing and building knowledge individual P&Cs can benefit and, over time, we can build capacity as a community.





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