

Putting volunteering to work: *How skills from volunteering count in the hiring process*

Research Summary

Experience gained from volunteering is a great way for job seekers to stand out from the crowd - and for hiring managers to make the best hiring decisions. But how do we better connect job seekers who have gained useful skills and experience from volunteering, to hiring managers facing the challenge of hard to fill roles?

The aim of our research

We know that volunteering helps build useful experience, while also helping those who are making hiring decisions to choose the right future employee. SEEK Volunteer data shows that about 40% of applications come from people wanting to use volunteering to progress their career.

So, SEEK Volunteer undertook research to examine the value candidates, hiring managers and volunteer managers put on volunteering, what exactly they value and how the volunteering experience can be used to help the candidate stand out in the hiring process. The report is designed for those looking for work, and looking to provide real and practical insights on how to make the most of the volunteer experience.

The outcomes of our research

Our research looks for better ways to connect the benefits of volunteering to career paths. The report uncovered insights that can benefit three distinct audiences: hiring managers, job seekers and volunteer managers.

- 75% of hiring managers agree that volunteer experience is an advantage in a job interview, with an encouraging 4 out of 5 hiring managers agreeing that volunteering can be great to gain experience and skills to use in skilled work.
- Job seekers can use volunteering to bridge the experience gap and stand out in their job applications, however, they have to make sure that the experience is relevant and that they are communicating their experience in a way that appeals to hiring managers.
- Volunteer managers can communicate their available positions in new and innovative ways, particularly if they think about attracting a new generation of entry level workers.

Key findings: hiring managers

One of the key barriers that hiring managers face when reviewing a candidate's application, is assessing their experience. Volunteering can help remove that barrier.

- Hiring managers can struggle to find the right applicants for entry level positions, due to a lack of paid work experience, or a difficulty in framing their life experience. 71% of hiring managers said quality of candidates was the main challenge they faced.
- Hiring managers also can have difficulty in assessing volunteer experience, and knowing the right questions to ask to unlock that experience. "I really want to hear about their volunteering experience that is relevant to the job they are applying for," said one hiring manager. "If I can't see how it will help them in the job, it isn't as impactful."
- Hiring managers place importance on transferable skills when assessing experience, and one way to gain these is through volunteering. One interviewee confirmed that volunteering "can provide you with skills you didn't have before... those skills that can transfer into the job you might apply for one day."
- In the research, 57% of hiring managers agreed that intensive hiring processes were a challenge. Valuing and assessing volunteer experience can help lessen that load.

Key findings: job seekers

The good news for young job seekers with volunteering experience? The research found that for people starting their career, almost 1 in 2 hiring managers rank volunteer experience as one of the most valuable factors to consider.

People can use their volunteer experience to demonstrate how they can transfer their skills to a workplace. One thing that can hold them back, is the ability to express how their volunteer experience is applicable.

- To help overcome the paid work experience gap, candidates, especially those entering the workforce for the first time, can use volunteer experience to bridge that gap.
- Volunteering can also be used as a way to stand out in a job application, as it showcases a caring nature and willingness to help, as well as a focus on good culture, determination, and skill development.
Job seekers need to frame their volunteer experience in a way that the hirer can recognise and understand, so that the value of volunteering is not overlooked.

Key advice for volunteer managers

If you're a volunteer manager, how do you promote your roles? Do you focus on social impact or the skills that an individual could gain? Are you exploring new and innovative ways to talk to your applicants?

Our research found that there is a crucial need for volunteer managers to also communicate about their volunteer positions in a more accessible way, to advertise roles that appear to people who are looking to use or build skills through volunteering.

- Previously, volunteer managers have framed volunteering by leading with the positive social impact but now, they could push more for the skills and development that volunteering can provide.
- Writing and presenting these roles in a way that 'stands out' and targets a certain type of volunteer, can make a huge difference.
- Understanding the younger, entry-level cohort who are looking for volunteering opportunities could help in marketing these roles using different language.

How we carried out the research

'Putting volunteering to work' was based on qualitative and quantitative research with hiring managers and candidates.

The research had three main goals:

- Identify how hiring managers assess volunteer experience during the hiring process
- Evaluate the value of volunteer experience
- Bring to light how different insights around the topic vary for different groups

The qualitative research involved conducting twelve in-depth interviews with hiring managers, exploring the hiring process, and the value that volunteering adds to the overall application.

The quantitative research used an online survey of over 450 respondents in Australia and New Zealand. This survey was designed to back up the qualitative findings, while helping to put a number to key preferences, and assess any big differences between sub-groups.