



# MODULE 2 ONBOARDING

A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING NEW VOLUNTEERS

CREDIT: TASMANIA FIRE SERVICE







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This document collects only the PDF pages from Module 2: Onboarding, and does not include videos or other elements of the module. The numbering system used in this document corresponds to the topic folders in the larger Module 2: Onboarding.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE ONBOARDING MODULE

## REFLECTION EXERCISE

Take a moment to think back to a time when you first started as a volunteer at your group...

1. What processes did you go through when you first joined? How did you become an active operational and/or non-operational volunteer who could perform and get involved in volunteering duties?
2. Was there anything you remember enjoying about that early phase of your volunteering journey? What went well for you in that first phase?
3. Was there anything you remember not enjoying during that first phase, or things that could have been done better for you during that time?





4. Now think about your current group's situation. What processes are in place for new volunteers currently? What experiences would a new volunteer go through before they can participate fully in group activities?

5. Can you think of any ways you could improve the processes or experiences for new volunteers?





## 2. STEP 1: REGISTERING YOUR NEW VOLUNTEERS

### CASE STUDIES

Take 5 minutes to read the two case studies written below.

EXAMPLE 1	EXAMPLE 2
<p>John has always been very interested in volunteering with his local fire brigade as a firefighter, so he decided to pay the brigade a visit.</p> <p>When John visited his local fire brigade, the leader told him about the volunteer firefighter role and what he should be expecting if he joined. The leader did not show John around the place, nor did he explain what the volunteer registration process was like.</p> <p>John did not feel very wanted, but he asked for the registration forms, and filled them out. Even though John had handed in his paperwork, his registration papers were not processed for 3 months because the leader and volunteers within the brigade wanted to “wait and see” if John was fully committed to being a volunteer with their brigade.</p> <p>In those 3 months, John was asked to attend meetings, but he could not train with others, or go out on call-outs or incidents as he was not formally registered or trained.</p> <p>In the end, John left the brigade because he did not feel valued as a new volunteer, nor did he feel he was ‘part of the group’.</p>	<p>Sarah has always been very interested in volunteering as a firefighter, so she went to her local fire brigade to register.</p> <p>When Sarah showed up, the leader showed her around the brigade, introduced her to other volunteers, and told her what it means to be a volunteer firefighter. Sarah was given registration forms to fill out, and any questions or concerns that she had about the role were addressed immediately. Her registration forms were processed within 30 days after she handed them in.</p> <p>Sarah felt very welcomed by the volunteering group and felt like she was taken seriously by the brigade.</p> <p>After she was registered, she received a Confirmation of Registration (COR), with information regarding her volunteer identification number, induction, training options, in addition to a message expressing appreciation for her signing up to become a volunteer.</p> <p>By receiving her COR, Sarah felt valued by the brigade and part of the group. She felt confident and informed as to what she needed to do next.</p>

1. What do you think might have gone wrong with John's onboarding process, that may have caused him to leave (Example 1)?





2. What do you think went right in Sarah's onboarding process that may have caused her to stay (Example 2)?

3. How would you improve the onboarding in both circumstances?

Write your suggestions for improvement down in the boxes provided below.

**EXAMPLE 1: JOHN**

**EXAMPLE 2: SARAH**





## 3. STEP 2: INDUCTING YOUR NEW VOLUNTEERS

### THINKING EXERCISE

Upon signing up to become a volunteer, what important information do new volunteers in your group need to know about?

Here are some examples:

- » The mission, vision, and values of your volunteering group.
- » Your group's Code of Conduct.
- » The management and operational structure of your group.
- » The different volunteering roles and responsibilities in your group ("who does what").
- » Information on policies (e.g., health and safety, social media policy, financial).
- » Information on training, rosters, uniforms, or equipment use.
- » Information on social and mental health support options available.

1. What information is most important for new volunteers to know?

2. How will you present important information to your new volunteers?

If you are looking for ideas, other groups have presented information to new volunteers in these ways:

- » Creating an induction booklet and giving it to new volunteers to read and then hosting a follow-up session to address questions or concerns they might have.
- » Presenting the most relevant and important information to a group of new volunteers using PowerPoint.





## 4. STEP 3: SUPPORTING YOUR NEW VOLUNTEERS

### THINKING EXERCISE

What support systems do you currently have in place in your volunteering group?

For example, do volunteers have mentors, peer buddies, or peer supporters? Do volunteers regularly check in with one another?

1. Write down the different support systems you have and what volunteers do to support one another within your group. If you are not sure what support systems exist, ask your volunteers what they do, or note down the support systems you would like to introduce.
2. How can you improve the support systems you have within your group? For example, could you structure regular check-in sessions, pair volunteers up with mentors or peer buddies, or promote mental health support services regularly to ensure that volunteers feel safe to use them?





## 5. STEP 4: TRAINING YOUR NEW VOLUNTEERS

### THINKING EXERCISE

How do you support the training of your new volunteers?

For example, are new or junior volunteers paired with senior and more experienced volunteers? How do you encourage volunteers to share knowledge and wisdom with each other? How do you encourage new volunteers to learn by observing experienced volunteers? How often do you or other volunteers provide feedback to each other?

1. To start, note down what your group does to support the training of new volunteers.
2. How could you improve the training of your new volunteers? For example, how are your training nights organised? Is the training both realistic and relevant? Are there opportunities for other volunteers to provide training to each other? How often are check-ins scheduled? How regularly do you provide positive and constructive feedback? What could you do differently?







## 6. STEP 5: ENGAGING YOUR NEW VOLUNTEERS

### THINKING EXERCISE

1. What are some ways that you show appreciation and recognition to volunteers in your group?
2. Are there other ways you could recognise your volunteers or celebrate their achievements? What are some of these ideas?
3. What roles or tasks could you give your volunteers that would provide them with more autonomy and freedom? For example, could the more tech-savvy volunteers in your group take on volunteer recruitment through social media?





## 7. PROBATION

### WHAT TO DO AND WHAT NOT TO DO

The probationary period typically takes place within the first 3 to 6 months of a volunteer's journey. Probation is a time where new volunteers and the volunteering group can assess if the role and group is the right fit for the new volunteer.

Here are some tips on what you should and should not do for probation:

PROBATION DO'S	PROBATION DON'TS
<b>COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY</b>	<b>INEFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give new volunteers relevant and clear information early on (<b>see Induction section</b>).</li><li>• Communicate what is expected of the new volunteer (e.g., hours needed per week, rules to follow).</li><li>• Inform the new volunteers what the probationary period is for and how long it will be.</li><li>• Provide volunteers positive and constructive feedback on their performance and/or progress.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not providing new volunteers with enough information or giving them too much information at once.</li><li>• Not communicating regularly with new volunteers.</li><li>• Not giving new volunteers feedback on their performance and/or progress.</li><li>• Not informing new volunteers what the outcome of their probationary period is upon completion.</li></ul>
<b>SUPPORT VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>RESTRICT SUPPORT</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide new volunteers with social support (<b>see Support section</b>).</li><li>• Give volunteers the means to complete the basic training they need.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Withholding the new volunteers' registration papers for longer than a month.</li><li>• Socially isolating the new volunteers.</li><li>• Preventing new volunteers from doing any basic training.</li></ul>
<b>CLARIFY</b>	<b>TREAT VOLUNTEERS UNFAIRLY</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clarify any concerns or questions the new volunteers may have about their role.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Setting unrealistic expectations for the new volunteers (e.g., expecting them to always be available).</li><li>• Assessing the new volunteers based on traits that are not related to the role (e.g., their sense of humour or interest in certain sports).</li></ul>
<b>ASSESS FIT</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use this period as a time to assess fit (e.g., how well the new volunteer mixes with other volunteers, how well they perform tasks).</li><li>• Inform new volunteers on the outcome of their probationary period upon completion.</li></ul>	





## THINKING EXERCISE

Take some time to reflect on the probationary practices you put in place for new volunteers that join your volunteering group.

1. How long is a probationary period for new volunteers that join your group?
2. What are new volunteers allowed and not allowed to do during probation?
3. What training and support is given to new volunteers while they are on probation?
4. What improvements could you make to the probation process?







## 8. ONBOARDING CHECKLIST

This checklist can be printed and used each time a new volunteer or group of new volunteers joins. It can be used as a guide to make sure that processes to support volunteers are in place and followed within a new volunteer's first year.

### STEP 1: REGISTERING YOUR NEW VOLUNTEERS

The registration form for the new volunteer was processed.

Relevant forms may include registration forms at the volunteering group, service, and organisational levels.

The new volunteer has completed all applicable checks (e.g., National Police Clearance, Working with Children Check).

The new volunteer is informed if they are on probation, what that involves, and how long the probationary period will be.

A Confirmation of Registration (COR) was given to the new volunteer, via email and/or a physical copy.

### STEP 2: INDUCTING YOUR NEW VOLUNTEERS

A formal induction session was held for the new volunteer, either as a presentation and/or with an induction booklet. In the induction session:

Information on the training pathways were given.

Information on the social and mental health support services available to volunteers were given.

The new volunteer was shown around the place, so that they understand where the different rooms, facilities, and equipment are.

The new volunteer was introduced to other volunteers within the group.

The new volunteer was given the opportunity to voice their concerns and questions, and they received clarification.

The new volunteer has been asked if they have any prior skills they could contribute to the group.

### STEP 3: SUPPORTING YOUR NEW VOLUNTEERS

The social support system in place within your volunteering group has been discussed with the new volunteer.

The new volunteer has been paired with a mentor, and/or

The new volunteer has been paired with a peer 'buddy'.

The new volunteer has been introduced to the volunteer who coordinates all new volunteers.

Guidelines have been set for the social support system (e.g., number of check-ins, what information/knowledge should be shared).

Feedback was exchanged on the fit and usefulness of the support given.

Information on the social and mental health support services available has been given to the new volunteer and their family (if applicable).





## STEP 4: TRAINING YOUR NEW VOLUNTEERS

The training requirements were communicated early on to the new volunteer to provide them with a realistic understanding of what they will be doing and how long it should take.

The new volunteer has completed their induction training.

The new volunteer has completed all mandatory courses and basic training required to perform effectively in their operational and non-operational roles.

The new volunteer has been given learning opportunities within their group.

The new volunteer is participating in shadowing or observational learning.

Where applicable, flexible arrangements have been made to accommodate a new volunteer who is unable to attend formal training courses.

Positive and constructive feedback were exchanged regarding the new volunteer's training progress.

## STEP 5: ENGAGING YOUR NEW VOLUNTEERS

The new volunteer has been given a letter acknowledging that they have met the basic requirements needed to perform in an operational and/or non-operational volunteering capacity. This acknowledgement letter or certificate was given:

- At a formal graduation ceremony, or

- At a volunteering group meeting (with senior volunteers present).

Any contributions or achievements made by the new volunteer has been acknowledged.

Uniforms were handed to the new volunteer by volunteer leaders (if possible).

Information was given to the new volunteer on what to expect next (e.g., team allocation, roster information, expectations for call-outs or incidents).





## 8. TEMPLATE FOR LETTER OF ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Use the template below to guide the letter you can write to new volunteers when they have completed their induction and basic training, and can now perform as an active operational and/or non-operational volunteer.

Include logos specific to your organisation, service, and/or individual group (if applicable).

Dear [insert name of volunteer],

We are very pleased to inform you that you are now an active volunteer at the [insert the name of your volunteering group]. This means you have successfully completed your basic training and are now able to operate actively in the role of [insert volunteering role here] within our group.

Thank you so much for your contributions and efforts that you have made so far! We appreciated your efforts in [insert specific and relevant positive feedback on their efforts and contributions to the group].

### WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

From this point forward, you will be actively operating within our team. Here is what you need to know:

[Include information on team allocations, roster information, and/or expectations on the number of call-outs they can expect to participate in.]

We appreciate all the hard work, dedication, and skills that you have contributed to our group. We are excited to have you in our team and are looking forward to seeing you progress in your volunteering.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact [insert relevant contact information].

Thank you.

Signed by,  
[Name of Volunteer Leader]





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