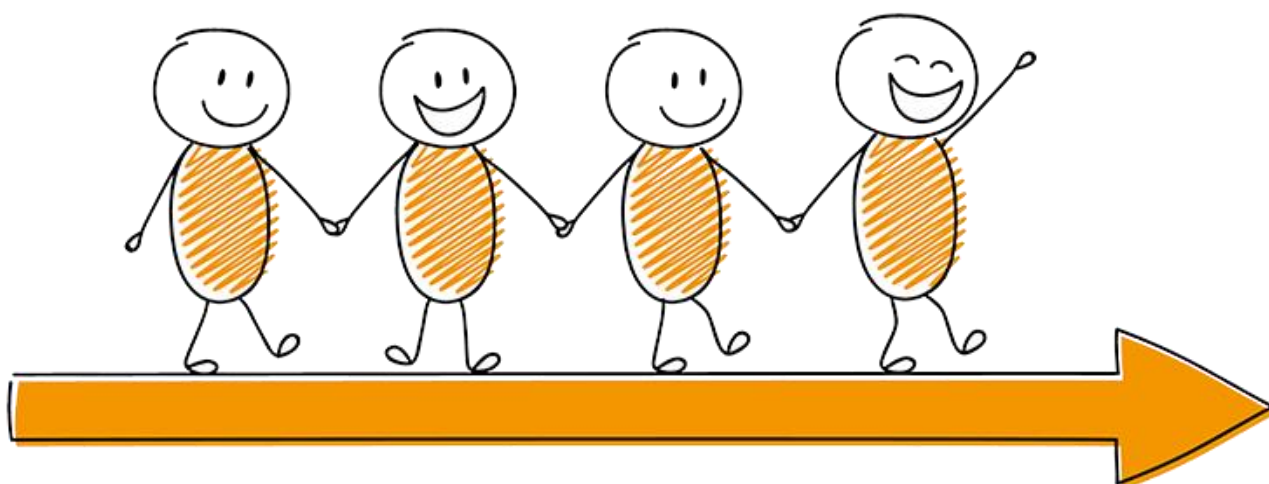


# Guide to Attracting & Engaging Autistic Volunteers



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## About this Resource

Welcome to your journey to becoming a more inclusive and accessible volunteering organisation!

This journey will involve three steps, each aiming to provide you with simple and practical tools to increase your organisations accessibility and engagement with the autistic community. This includes:

- [Step 1: Developing a Shared Understanding](#)
- [Step 2: Attracting and Engaging Autistic Volunteers](#)
- [Step 3: Supporting and Retaining Autistic Volunteers](#)

We encourage you to work through each section progressively given each step builds on the last. If you want to extend your knowledge in a particular area, we have provided links to [External Resources](#) at the end of this guide that are relevant to each section.

Throughout your journey, we aim to provide:

- A more accessible volunteering environment for the autistic community
- Increased confidence to attract and engage autistic volunteers
- Easy to use tools and resources to implement change
- Greater access to volunteers from a diverse range of backgrounds and strengths

Before we go further, it's important to note that there will be an absence of medical and clinical language when describing autism in these resources. This is intentional.

We approach autism from the social model of disability, emphasising the strengths and unique characteristics of the autistic community while trying to enact societal change by addressing and removing unintentional barriers that may exist. You can find out more about the social model of disability from [People with Disability Australia](#).

Along your journey you will become accustomed to this perspective, and hopefully recognise that the autistic community has a range of different experiences that can bring valuable and unique skills to the volunteering sector.

First, we will begin with some basic information regarding autism, working to create a foundation for the practical changes ahead.



## Step One: A Shared Understanding

## What is Autism?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental difference that affects how people interact with the world around them.

These differences aren't necessarily positive or negative – they are just that – different!

In Australia, around [1 in 100 people identify as autistic](#), and many more have a personal connection to someone with autism.

Everyone with autism has their own unique experience, with some individuals requiring just a little bit of support while others require more. This may be in the form of a support worker or technology. There are some common characteristics to autism which may be shared amongst the community.

## Common Characteristics of Autism

Common characteristics refer to several contexts where an autistic individual may experience the world in a distinct and unique way. These characteristics are often understood across several broad areas, including:

- Interests & Routines
- Communication
- Executive Functioning
- Sensory processing

As a starting point, we have provided some examples below to give you a general idea of what these characteristics *can* look like in an autistic person. We will cover these more in-depth in [Step 3: Supporting Unique Preferences](#).

Prior to that, we would like to briefly highlight that any given member of the autistic community will have their own unique way of interacting with the world around them.

To quote Dr Stephen Shore, ***"If you have met one person with autism, you have met one person with autism"***.

| Context                      | What can it look like?                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Communication</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Direct, honest and literal in communication</li><li>➤ Focus on meaningful conversations instead of small talk</li><li>➤ Strong ability to understand and appreciate literal language</li></ul> |
| <b>Sensory Processing</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Heightened (or lowered) sensitivity and awareness to certain sensations</li><li>➤ Preference for quiet environments and low-sensory environments</li></ul>                                     |
| <b>Executive Functioning</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Unique and intuitive approaches to addressing problems, using visual and spatial characteristics</li><li>➤ Ability to intensely focus and sustain attention on a singular task</li></ul>       |

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A preference for tasks that are goal-oriented and broken down into steps</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Interests and Routines</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Pursuing specific interests in great detail, often to an expert level</li> <li>➤ Engaging in activities that involve direct and concrete problem-solving</li> <li>➤ Preference for established routines and predictable structures</li> </ul> |

If you are a visual learner, the autism wheel is another way of expressing this sense of individuality. While everyone shares a common bond within the autistic community, each individual has their own personal circumstances and preferences that give them their own different and unique shade of autism.



Illustration: Developed from the autism app wheel created by Mark Coppin in 2012

### *The Autism Wheel*

In addition, it's important to recognise that there is a range of external organisations that provide research and evidence-based information. Learning from these organisations and their experiences can help you develop a comprehensive understanding of autism from a range of community members. You can find several examples in our [External Resources](#) section.

### **Key Takeaways**

- While some common characteristics are shared amongst the autistic community, everyone has their own **unique preferences** and **style!**
- There are a range of organisations that aim to support the autistic community and provide valuable information and research (see [External Resources](#)).

## Talking about Autism

Early views on autism were defined by a medical model of disability, often focussing on 'fixing' autism. This perspective separated the person from their autistic traits, describing autism in symptoms and impairments. A range of negative stereotypes accompanied this view, albeit unintentionally.

Over the past 30 years, movements in neurodiversity and self-advocacy challenged this perspective and begun embracing autism as a natural variation on the spectrum of human diversity.

Symptoms became unique characteristics. Autism became part of one's identity.

We recommend reading Harvard's ['What is Neurodiversity'](#) publication for more background regarding the neurodiversity movement.

One of the major changes was a move from person-first to identity-first language, reflecting the adoption of autism into one's identity (e.g., I am an *autistic* person) versus person-first language (e.g., I am a person *living with autism*) which separated autism from the individual.

We have provided a brief overview of how language has changed with several examples:

| Medical Model Language                                                                                                   | Societal Change                                    | Autistic Preferred                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Person-first language</b><br>Person living with autism<br>Individual with autism<br>Individual on the autism spectrum | →<br><b>A movement towards neurodiversity</b><br>→ | <b>Identity-first language</b><br>Autie<br>Autistic<br>Neurodivergent |
| Symptoms and impairments                                                                                                 |                                                    | Unique characteristics and experiences                                |
| Co-morbidity                                                                                                             |                                                    | Co-occurring                                                          |
| Function (e.g. high/low functioning) and levels                                                                          |                                                    | Specific support needs                                                |

While there is a preferred language style within the autistic community, we come from the perspective it is **okay to not be perfect**. How you refer to someone ultimately depends on the preferences of the individual and open communication.

What *really* matters is a focus on developing an attitude that reflects a genuine understanding and respect for the lived experience of autism. You take the time to listen, respect and reflect on individual preferences and experiences within the community.

If you are ever unsure of a certain word that is related to autism, we have also provided you with a [Glossary of Common Autistic Terms](#) that can explain commonly used concepts and phrases.

## Key Takeaway

- No-one expects you to be perfect, but **taking the time to listen** and having a **willingness to understand** is key!

## Autistic Volunteer Strengths

Understanding autism in the volunteering sector can be greatly supported by adopting a strengths-based approach.

This approach acknowledges that unique characteristics can be used to better understand, identify and match autistic volunteers to roles and environments where they can thrive.

While particular strengths can vary from person to person, several core strengths are common:

Detail-oriented    Respectful of rules    Empathetic  
Articulate    Focused    Logical Thinking    Committed  
Unique Skills & Experience    Intelligence    Special Interests  
Strong sense of justice    Loyal    Honest

These are just a few examples of strengths from our experience with autistic volunteers. We have provided additional examples below of how these strengths translate to desirable characteristics in the volunteering sector.

|                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unique Skills, Experience & Special Interests | Autistic volunteers frequently find unique ways to engage with their environment, which can bring a new and unique set of skills, training and experience to your volunteering organisation.              |
| Long-term commitment & Loyal                  | A tendency to prefer familiar environments and routines accompanied by a strong sense of loyalty means autistic volunteers may be interested in a long-term commitment to your volunteering organisation. |
| Strong sense of justice & Honest              | A strong sense of justice tends to mean autistic volunteers are often trustworthy and ethical, which can create a reliable and loyal volunteer.                                                           |
| Respectful of rules                           | Autistic volunteers can thrive in places with clear guidelines and procedures – perfect for many of the fields that rely on volunteers and an organised approach.                                         |

|                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Empathetic      | Many autistic adults develop an empathetic understanding and appreciation for diversity through their own lived experience which can be extended to the communities your volunteering organisation supports.         |
| Detail-Oriented | Often autistic adults have a keen eye for detail, noticing patterns and perspectives that other volunteers may overlook. Tasks that require high levels of focus and attention can be ideal for autistic volunteers. |

## Autism and Volunteering

This is just the beginning of your journey to creating a more autism affirming volunteering environment. Most of what we have discussed has been values-based, giving you an insight into the autistic community and providing some context for the upcoming resources.

We would like to quickly acknowledge that the volunteering sector has a demonstrated track-record engaging disabled volunteers, making up approximately [27.6% of the total informal volunteers in Australia](#). It is likely that you and other volunteering organisations already embody a culture of accessibility towards the autistic community.

Yet, there is always room to increase the capacity and confidence between the autistic community and volunteering sector. We have provided practical and easy to implement changes in the upcoming sections that can greatly increase your accessibility to the autistic community

To wrap up your first step in this journey, we have provided a checklist, [Foundations of an Autism Affirming Volunteering Organisation: A Checklist](#). This checklist details four guiding principles and several actions you can take to become a more accessible and inclusive volunteering organisation.

We encourage you to use this checklist as a starting point, or as a reminder, of *how* you embrace diversity and inclusion.

Here is a brief overview of each principle and how it relates to accessibility and inclusion:

| Principle            | What can it look like?                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Communication</b> | An open and explicit dialogue between all members of an organisation, with a willingness to listen and develop a shared understanding with a diverse and unique range of volunteers. |
| <b>Collaboration</b> | All volunteers working together, using a strengths-based approach to identify suitable roles and tasks and overcome any barriers to engagement.                                      |

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Commitment</b> | A dedication to ongoing learning and improvement, taking actionable and tangible steps to engage with diverse populations and recognise their unique contribution. |
| <b>Curiosity</b>  | A willingness to take on new perspectives and better understand the lived experience of individuals.                                                               |

### Key Takeaway

- There are a range of **practical and easy-to-implement tools and checklists** in the upcoming resources (Step 2 and 3!)

## Foundations of an Autism Affirming Volunteering Organisation: A Checklist

The 4C's (**Communication, Commitment, Collaboration and Curiosity**) convey an **attitude**, one that embraces the autistic identity and recognises the unique skills and perspectives they can bring to your volunteering organisation. We believe this can be achieved at an individual or organisational level. Please use this checklist for some actions to get you started on your journey!

| Am I ready?              | Key Area             | Actions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Communication</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Communicate your commitment to the autistic community and inclusion to all volunteers</li> <li>➤ Maintain and encourage open and honest dialogue by proactively reaching out and engaging with the autistic community</li> <li>➤ Use active listening to understand diverse perspectives and promote effective communication</li> </ul>                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Commitment</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Take on opportunities to engage autistic volunteers</li> <li>➤ Proactively engage with local autism advocacy networks and support services</li> <li>➤ Actively reflect and develop processes continuously improve upon how to better engage with autistic volunteers</li> <li>➤ Enact simple changes to your policies and procedures to increase accessibility</li> </ul> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Collaboration</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Acknowledge, understand and recognise the strengths of autistic volunteers</li> <li>➤ Foster a volunteering culture of respect, trust and mutual support</li> <li>➤ Engage current autistic volunteers at your organisation and seek feedback</li> </ul>                                                                                                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Curiosity</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Challenge and reflect on your own preconceptions</li> <li>➤ Approach and seek new situations and volunteers outside of your normal operations</li> <li>➤ Actively use diverse perspectives to solve problems and create change</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                 |

## Step Two: Attracting and Engaging

## Opening the Conversation

You have learned some new information about autism and hopefully you're ready to make some practical changes to the way you engage and advertise to autistic volunteers.

This part of the journey is all about **increasing and communicating accessibility** to open up the conversation with the autistic community and work towards a thriving volunteering partnership.

We will be focussing on:

- Attracting new volunteers through simple changes to your volunteer listings and role descriptions
- A few tips on how to structure initial engagements when responding to expression of interest

It's important to remember that while all these recommendations have been designed to be easy to implement, they communicate many of the values and principles we have discussed in the previous resource.

After completing this step, you will be better equipped to engage and attract members of the autistic community to your volunteer organisation.

You will have achieved another important milestone in improving the accessibility of your organisation!



### Key Takeaway

- We want to **open the conversation** with the autistic community, and we can often do this best when advertising new volunteer roles and responding to expressions of interest.

## Attracting Autistic Volunteers

Some aspects of job listings and job descriptions may make it difficult for autistic applicants to apply for volunteer opportunities. Fortunately, by making simple changes to the language and style used in your volunteer listings and role descriptions, you can significantly increase accessibility for autistic applicants.

We have provided you with several checklists as a starting point. These will help you adjust your current and future volunteer role listings and descriptions, making them easier, clearer, and more accessible.

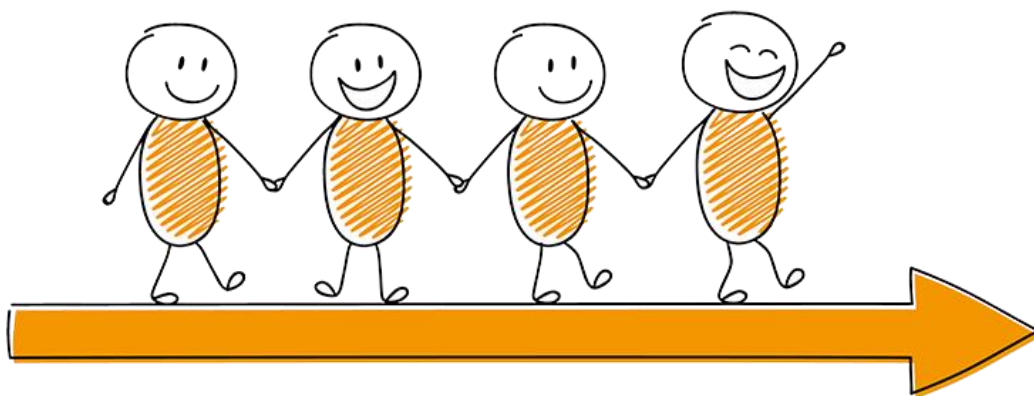
By making some of these changes, it is likely that **all applicants** will have a better understanding of the volunteering role advertised.

Each checklist covers the following area:

- General areas where language can be made more accessible across volunteer listings and descriptions
- More specific examples of how you can communicate flexibility and diversity in volunteer listings
- How you can tailor volunteer role descriptions to be clear and accommodating

It's important to note that several of these options express a willingness or providing an option for autistic applicants to discuss any support requirements.

These recommendations are non-committal and intended to open the discussion to potential adjustments and accommodations. What is considered reasonable and achievable will vary based on the specific needs of each individual, volunteer organisation, and role.



### Key Takeaway

- This section is aimed at **simple and easy to implement** changes to your volunteering role descriptions and listings aimed at opening a dialogue with the autistic community.

## Accessible Language in Role Listings & Descriptions: A Checklist

Making documents clear and easy to read is often the best way to clearly advertise and describe a volunteering role. We have provided some broad changes that can be made to existing and future communications and how this can be more accessible to the autistic community (and people more broadly!)

**Where can I make this change?** The changes in this section can be applied to any document that is provided to the public.

| Accessible Language      |                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Completed?               | Change                                                      | Why is it beneficial?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Supporting Information                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>All acronyms are expanded</b>                            | Expanding acronyms means giving the full meaning of shortened words or phrases. This can be really helpful in avoiding confusion and making it easier for autistic applicants to understand what is expected and what the volunteer listing requires. | Instead of using abbreviations like "VQ," it's better to use the complete term, like "Volunteering Queensland." This way, it's clear and easy to understand for everyone.                                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Jargon is simplified</b>                                 | Autistic applicants often work better with straightforward and clear language. Replacing complex terms with simpler ones will work to build a shared understanding.                                                                                   | Please see below some links to resources that can help you to identify commonly used terms<br>➤ <a href="#">Canva – Jargon of Jobs</a>                                                                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Slang and colloquialisms are avoided</b>                 | Language, cultural references, and social nuances communicated through slang and colloquialisms can be difficult to interpret for autistic applicants and can make expectations unclear.                                                              | Instead of using words like " <i>chill</i> ", " <i>giving 110%</i> " or " <i>win-win situation</i> " use terms like " <i>relaxed</i> ", " <i>putting effort into a task</i> " or " <i>everyone will benefit</i> ". |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Use identity-first language and avoid clinical terms</b> | Using identity-first language and avoiding clinical terms avoids continuing negative stereotypes and misconceptions and embraces the neurodiversity movement.                                                                                         | Review our language and external resources guide within these this guide!<br>➤ <a href="#">Talking About Autism</a><br>➤ <a href="#">External Resources</a>                                                        |

## Communicating Diversity & Flexibility in Volunteer Role Listings: A Checklist

Communicating a commitment to diversity and flexibility is a great way to attract autistic volunteers. It allows for further conversations relating to volunteering role adjustments and matching strengths of an individual to a particular role. We have provided several areas that can convey this message to a diverse range of volunteers.

**Where can I make this change?** These changes can be implemented in areas where you describe your organisation and set the scene for an applicant, for example this could be under 'About This Opportunity' in [Volunteering Queensland's role listings page](#). Think about anywhere you are introducing your organisation and mission to a new volunteer!

| Communicating Diversity & Flexibility |                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Completed?                            | Area                                                                          | Why is it beneficial?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Supporting Information                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/>              | <b>Include a link to a diversity statement on your listing and/or website</b> | A diversity statement shows that your organisation values diversity and is committed to including people with a range of abilities and experiences. It is a simple way of letting autistic applicants know you welcome them into your volunteering community.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | You can find examples of diversity statements outlined in the following links: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <a href="#">A range of large organizations</a></li> <li>➤ <a href="#">Volunteering Australia</a> - Diversity and inclusion statement.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>              | <b>Your willingness to make workplace adjustments</b>                         | <p>Articulating a <b>willingness</b> to make adjustments can help ensure autistic applicants can openly provide and discuss any adjustments that can support them to fulfill a volunteering role. This includes any preferred meeting structures and formats which is discussed later in this resource (See <a href="#">Engaging Autistic Volunteers</a>)</p> <p>It's important to note that <b>not all</b> autistic applicants will require adjustments to their role and what is</p> | <p>Adjustments relate to changes to a role or environment to better cater for an autistic volunteers sensory, executive functioning or communication needs. Types of adjustments are covered in Step Three:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <a href="#">Sensory Sensitivities</a></li> <li>➤ <a href="#">Thinking Preferences</a></li> <li>➤ <a href="#">Communication Styles</a></li> </ul> |

|   |                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|   |                                                                                         | <p>reasonable <b>depends on the requirements of your volunteering organization and roles available.</b></p> <p>An example may look like:</p> <p><i>"We are committed to inclusivity and recognize the importance of making adjustments to accommodate specific needs and preferences. We are open to discussing any preferred adjustments to the current role that can support you effectively"</i></p>                                                                                   | <p>At the beginning of the next section, we have also provided email templates that can help open the conversations to what (if any) adjustments can help facilitate participation in a volunteer role.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <a href="#">Before the Engagement: A Template</a></li> <li>➤ <a href="#">After the Engagement: A Template</a></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                   |
| □ | <p><b>Provide the option to request alternative formats other than written text</b></p> | <p>Providing the <b>option to request</b> alternative formats can help autistic applicants who process information in different and unique ways to access and comprehend the volunteer listing.</p> <p>An example may look like:</p> <p><i>"We understand that individuals process information in different ways, and we are open to accommodating those needs. If you need alternative formats other than written text (e.g., visual or simple English), please contact us at X"</i></p> | <p>Providing the option for video or audio descriptions in addition to written text greatly increases accessibility of volunteer role listings. Several organizations have provided tools and guides to creating alternative formats and increasing overall accessibility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <a href="#">Microsoft – Make your Word documents accessible to people with disabilities</a></li> <li>➤ <a href="#">Scope UK – Raising Standards with Alternative Formats</a></li> </ul> |

## Accessible Role Descriptions: A Checklist

Volunteering role descriptions are primarily aimed at articulating the responsibilities of a role and the skills required. It can serve as a reference point for organisations and individuals to discuss the expectations of a role and what is involved from day-to-day. We have suggested two changes that can make these descriptions more accessible for autistic volunteers.

**Where can I make this change:** We have used the example template in Volunteering Australia's resource '[Designing Volunteer Roles & Position Descriptions](#)' as a reference to where you can make these changes when designing volunteer descriptions. These changes relate to describing 'Key Responsibilities' and 'Skills, Experience & Attributes' within Volunteering Australia's template and are aimed at increasing accessibility.

| Clear Role Descriptions  |                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Completed?               | Area                                                          | Why is it beneficial?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Supporting Information                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Key Responsibilities are broken down into tasks</b>        | <p>Breaking down responsibilities of a volunteer role makes it easier for autistic applicants to understand the separate tasks involved. It also increases the capability to request and discuss potential volunteer role adjustments.</p> <p>This allows autistic applicants to feel comfortable opening a dialogue around how they can match their skills and requirements to different aspects of a volunteering role.</p> | <p>A role that involves helping an animal shelter with '<i>daily care tasks</i>' could be broken down into '<i>walking the animals, washing, and bathing, planning vet appointments and reaching out to potential adopters</i>'.</p> <p>This example may allow a potential applicant who needs communication adjustments to discuss any changes or support necessary when it comes to social aspects of the task.</p> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Only the essential requirements of the role are listed</b> | <p>There are a range of broad terms and descriptions that are common across all job roles than can be an unintentional barrier to applying. Often these requirements are not essential for the role listed.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>Phrases like '<i>great interpersonal skills</i>', '<i>ability to think outside the box</i>' and '<i>ability to work in a fast-paced environment</i>' may not accurately reflect the requirements of the role and often make their way into a lot of listings!</p> <p>Review the skills and requirements of the role and ask, '<i>is this really necessary to completing the role?</i>'.</p>                        |

## Putting it all together: A Brief Example

Below is a fictional advertisement for a volunteering role and position description at Animal Alliance. We have used the first three sections from Volunteering Australia's guide to role descriptions to help illustrate a supporting role description. We hope this can help you better understand how to implement some of the changes from our checklist.

Within the listing, the different colours highlight where potentially unclear information has been expanded upon and made more accessible.

***Please note that this example is for explanatory purposes and is not intended to reflect all of the requirements of a volunteering role listing!***

| Role Listing                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Before                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | After                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p>AA is seeking volunteers at our animal shelter to help with daily care tasks for our dogs. Candidates should have a good sense of humour and a passion for animal welfare and be able to work well in a team. Some experience working with animals is preferred but not necessary. Please apply by filling out our online application form.</p> | <p><b>Animal Alliance is seeking Animal Care Assistant's to volunteer at our animal shelter! We value diversity and are committed to creating an inclusive environment for all volunteers. You can find our diversity statement at <a href="http://www.aa.com.au/diversity">www.aa.com.au/diversity</a>.</b></p> <p><b>We are currently seeking a volunteer for specific tasks such as feeding and providing care for our animals, cleaning their living spaces, and walking dogs.</b></p> <p><b>No experience is required for the role, having a pet or prior contact with animals will be useful but not an essential requirement of the role.</b></p> <p><b>Candidates will work as part of a diverse team and will have a commitment to animal welfare.</b></p> <p><b>We encourage applications from people of diverse backgrounds, and if any questions, adjustments or accommodations are required please note this in the online application or contact Tanya on 3456 6543 or via email at <a href="mailto:tanya@animalalliance.com.au">tanya@animalalliance.com.au</a>.</b></p> |

| Role Description                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Position Title                   | Animal Care Assistant                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Key Responsibilities             | <p>We expect volunteers to assist in managing the personal hygiene and day-to-day operations of animals currently within the shelter.</p> <p>You will work as part of a diverse team committed to positive outcomes each and every animal.</p> <p>Key responsibilities include the following tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Feeding the animals (once in the morning)</li> <li>➤ Cleaning living spaces once per day, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Checking water bowls and sources are clean</li> <li>○ Removing and disposing of animal droppings</li> <li>○ Removing and storing any toys not currently being used</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Walking the dogs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Volunteers will walk the dogs once per day, around the shelter for approximately 20 minutes. There is a maximum of 3 dogs per volunteer.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Skills, Experiences & Attributes | <p>No previous skills or knowledge will be required to undertake the role, but volunteers will need a commitment to animal welfare and be comfortable interacting with animal droppings and physically touching the animals.</p> <p>Training will be provided for each of the key responsibilities.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

### Key Takeaways

- Accessible and clearly articulated volunteer listings and descriptions are just the beginning in a process of continual learning and improvement!
- Simple changes in **language** and **communication** can make volunteer role listings and descriptions more accessible to **all volunteers**.

## Engaging Autistic Volunteers

Congratulations – you have successfully created and advertised a volunteering role and now you are looking at engaging and meeting with a potential volunteer.

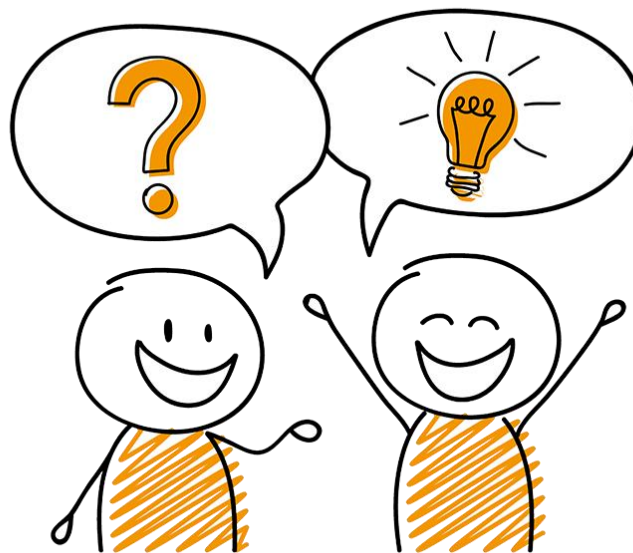
You may not actually know a potential volunteer is autistic, nor are they obliged to disclose this. However, you are able to provide the opportunity for an autistic volunteer to disclose and discuss any preferences and adjustments.

This section is intended to illustrate key areas throughout the engagement process for **all volunteers** to allow you to be forthcoming with inclusion.

We have provided questions and examples aimed at demonstrating how a conversation around one's disability can be facilitated when expressing interest in a volunteering role. This opens the channels of communication and creates a dialogue with autistic applicants to discuss any support required in a volunteering role (if additional support is required at all!).

Being forthcoming with these questions is a key part of the process as it opens the conversation for potential adjustments, the focus of upcoming information in [Step 3: Onboarding, Supporting & Retaining](#).

We have structured the following information according to two different stages of an initial engagement following an expression of interest: before and after.



### Key Takeaway

- The recommendations and questions in this section are aimed at facilitating your engagement with **all volunteers** and to provide the **opportunity** for an autistic volunteer to disclose and adjust any adjustments or support required (if any!!)

## Before the Engagement

Often the best time to make expectations clear and reduce uncertainty is before a meeting even begins. We have provided three tips and an example of how you can enact some of these changes in [‘Before the Engagement: A Template’](#).

### 1. Providing specific and detailed information to the applicant

Autistic volunteers benefit from having clear expectations and information ahead of time. Think about providing the following information in an e-mail, over the phone or whatever suits when setting up an engagement with a new volunteer.

- Date and time of the meeting (with an option for alternatives)
- Visually assisted instructions to the meeting location (e.g., a picture of the building)
- The name and number of participants attending the meeting
- Topics to be discussed
- Questions to be asked (see below on how to prepare questions and make them more accessible!)
- An opportunity to disclose any possible adjustments
- Refer to our [‘Before the Engagement: A Template’](#) at the end of this section.

### 2. Preparing questions (avoiding open-ended and unclear questions)

Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no” and require a longer and more detailed response. These questions can be unclear and may be interpreted differently for autistic volunteers and not answered within the original context.

Having alternatives to these questions in literal, concrete or in just a more targeted form can make all the difference. Autism from the Inside discusses the use of open-ended questions in their video [‘Autism Communication Strategies’](#).

We have provided a brief table below of how to translate potentially problematic questions to autism affirming versions.

| Original Open-Ended Questions                             | Modified Questions for Autistic Volunteers                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| How do you feel about volunteering on weekends?           | Would volunteering on weekends fit in your current weekly schedule? |
| What do you hope to gain out of the volunteer experience? | What are some specific goals you have for volunteering with us?     |
| What is your biggest strength?                            | What specific skills do you excel at?                               |
| Tell me about yourself?                                   | What are your personal preferences, interests, or hobbies?          |

### 3. Be flexible with meeting structures

Being flexible with meeting structures is important when engaging with autistic volunteers. They may have specific sensory needs and feel more comfortable in certain settings, so offering alternative options can create a more comfortable and collaborative meeting experience. Simply being open to alternatives communicates the flexibility of your volunteering organisation.

Some of these alternative options include:

- Online (e.g., ZOOM, Microsoft Teams) meetings may be less intimidating and preferable for a range of volunteers
- Sometimes small group discussions can be less intense than one-on-one meetings and allow for autistic applicants to better contribute and add input to the conversation
- A structured meeting with a clear agenda, direction of discussion and time-limits can make the meeting expectations clear and predictable

#### Before the Engagement: A Template

We have provided an example of a template that could be sent to a potential volunteer prior to meeting to discuss a volunteering role.

This template was developed for explanatory purposes, and we encourage you to adopt your own personal flavour and existing questions and processes! How this is communicated (e.g., over the phone, or email) depends on what works best for everyone involved.

| When               | Information Provided                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Before the Meeting | <p>Thank you for contacting us at <b>Animal Alliance!</b></p> <p>Dear <b>[Applicant]</b>,</p> <p>Thank you for expressing your interest in volunteering as <b>Animal Care Assistant</b> with <b>Animal Alliance</b>. We are excited to have you on board as a potential volunteer and we want to make sure that our organisation is a welcoming and inclusive environment for you. The meeting details are as below. If you would prefer to communicate or meet over another format (e.g., online) or have any other specific requirements, please do not hesitate to let us know.</p> <p><b>Date:</b> <b>May 1<sup>st</sup> 2023</b><br/><b>Time:</b> <b>10:00am – 11:00am</b><br/><b>Location:</b> <b>57 Volunteer St, Gibson 4098</b><br/><b>Physical location:</b> <b>(Picture and Instructions)</b><br/><b>Attendees:</b> <b>Ross Gibson (Volunteer Manager), Geoff Scott (Volunteer Mentor)</b></p> |

To ensure that we can provide you with the best possible volunteering experience, we would like to give you a few questions before our initial meeting. These questions are a great opportunity for you to tell us about your strengths, any concerns, and how we can both get the most out of your volunteering experience. You can give your responses to the questions via return email or bring them with you to the meeting to discuss.

- Would volunteering on weekend fit in your current weekly schedule?
- What are some specific goals you have for volunteering with us?
- What specific skills do you excel at?
- What are your personal preferences, interests or hobbies?
- Do you have any personal preferences or adjustments we should know about to provide you with a positive volunteering experience? (e.g., ways to accommodate medical conditions, neurodiversity, support workers?)

We value your commitment to making a difference in the lives of animals and appreciate the time you've taken to reach out to us. If you have any further questions or require specific accommodations, please don't hesitate to contact **Ross Gibson (Volunteer Manager) at [email]** or **Geoff Scott (Volunteer Mentor) at [email]**

We look forward to discussing these questions in person or reviewing them a reply email. We will see you on May 1st, 2023 to discuss how we can best your volunteering experience with us.

Best regards,  
**Animal Alliance**

### Key Takeaway

- The more **clarity** and **detail** you can provide before an engagement can often help to create a shared understanding and clear path to success!
- Be willing to **slightly adjust** your current approach can increase accessibility and open a dialogue to discuss any support needed within a volunteering role.

## After the Engagement

Just like before the engagement, resolving any uncertainty and expectations after engagement is an important aspect of developing a clear direction and establishing a path for success. There are two quick tips and an example at the end of this section in [‘After The Engagement: A Template’](#).

### 1. Detail the next steps via phone, e-mail or preferred contact method

Providing specific information on the next steps allows an autistic volunteer to clearly understand the expectations and requirements of the role.

- This may include start date, start time, further instruction (with visuals) on how to get to the volunteering location.
- You can take this opportunity to break a volunteering role down into tasks (if you haven’t already) and ensure the expectations of a role are clear. This allows for further discussions regarding any potential adjustments or supports.

### 2. Proactively offer additional support

An autistic volunteer may require adjustments and additional support in a role to suit their strengths and skills. This may be in addition to a support worker that accompanies them to the role. Being forthcoming in opening the dialogue for adjustments allows for better strength-based role matching and a more collaborative relationship. This works to break down barriers and makes autistic applicants feel more comfortable about openly discussing their needs.

- Link autistic volunteers in with a mentor, buddy or peer to support them navigate a new role (discussed further in [Step 3: Supportive Relationships](#)).
- Encourage ongoing feedback on how you can better support an autistic volunteer within their role

## After the Engagement: A Template

The example below provides an illustration of what information can be provided to a potential volunteer after an initial engagement.

This template was developed for explanatory purposes, and we encourage you to adopt your own personal flavour and existing processes. You may also have different ways of communicating with your volunteers.

The most important aspects are relate to an example of making a sensory adjustment, responsibilities broken down into tasks, alternative formats of information and a link in with a mentor or supportive figure.

| When                     | Information Provided                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>After the Meeting</b> | <p>Welcome to <a href="#">Animal Alliance</a>! We're so happy to have you on board as a volunteer. As discussed at our initial meeting, we have listed the details of your next meet-up for the volunteering role with us.</p> <p><b>Date:</b> <a href="#">30/05/23</a><br/> <b>Time:</b> <a href="#">1:00pm – 3:00pm</a><br/> <b>Volunteering location:</b> <a href="#">Animal Alliance HQ, 157 Berry Road, Gibson 4098</a><br/> <b>Visual location:</b> (<a href="#">Picture and Instructions</a>)</p> <p><b>Role description and tasks:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sign in and meet Geoff, your mentor, at reception</li> <li>2. Clean the living spaces of the animals</li> <li>3. Walk the dogs for 30 minutes</li> <li>4. Feed the dogs with the food provided in the fridge labelled '<i>Dog Food</i>'</li> <li>5. Put away leads and toys and sign out at reception</li> </ol> <p>If there any additional skills you believe you could bring to a volunteering role or if you have any questions about the tasks above, please let us know!</p> <p>We have also discussed your request for sensory adjustments in the animal living area. We are more than happy to dim the lights in the animal living area, if you need any further adjustments or if this isn't suitable please contact Geoff and we can discuss further.</p> <p>Please keep in contact with your mentor <a href="#">[Geoff]</a> around how this is working for you and we can discuss any other further adjustments you may need.</p> <p>We look forward to having an ongoing and collaborative volunteering partnership.</p> <p>Best regards, <a href="#">Animal Alliance</a></p> |

### Key Takeaway

- **Be proactive!** Combining Before the Engagement and After the Engagement templates allows for a dialogue to open about potential adjustments and accommodations we discuss in Step 3.

## Step Three: Onboarding, Supporting & Retaining

## Thriving Relationships

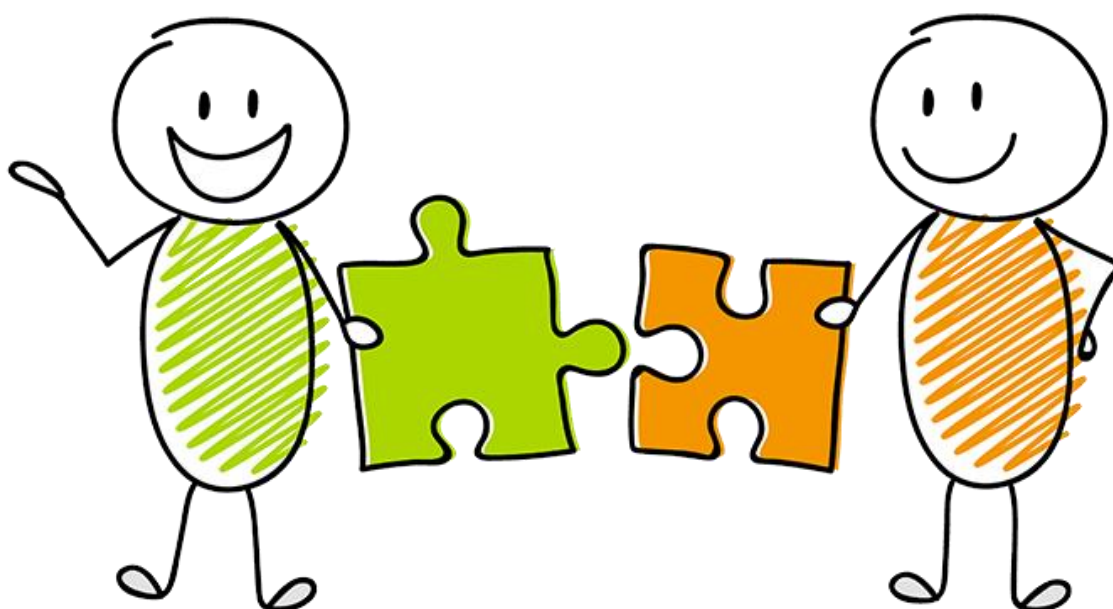
You have begun to create an accessible volunteering organisation through your advertisement and engagement with the autistic community.

Now comes the most important part – **onboarding, supporting and retaining** autistic volunteers to create collaborative and thriving relationships.

We have broken this down into three sections:

- Onboarding New Autistic Volunteers
- Understanding & Supporting Unique Preferences
- Encouraging long-term development

We hope that by completing this step, you can develop productive relationships that enable the growth and well-being of new autistic volunteers and your volunteering organisation more broadly!



### Key Takeaways

- Simple changes to the way you **onboard and support** autistic volunteers can make all the difference for developing a long-term and collaborative relationship.

## Onboarding New Autistic Volunteers

Existing volunteers and staff members are well-placed to facilitate and support new and emerging members of volunteering community. You can also implement practical strategies to make the onboarding process easier for everyone involved.

Our focus in this section is supporting autistic volunteers to navigate new relationships, expectations and tasks during the onboarding process. We have done this by giving you an overview of what a supportive role might look like, and three practical tips you can consider in your current onboarding process.

### Supportive Roles

Providing a sense of support for a new autistic volunteer is particularly important, given they might have a range of unique preferences and characteristics.

How a new volunteer is onboarded and supported will vary, but may include a mentor, buddy and peer support arrangements. Sometimes there is no defined relationship or arrangement, with all members of a volunteering community working together to create supportive culture. What we are trying to say is there is **no correct or one way** to onboard and support new volunteers.

Yet, there are several autism affirming strategies to help you fulfill a supportive role for an autistic individual entering the volunteering sector. This could be as a mentor, buddy or spread throughout your organisational culture. It all depends on the situation, role and resources of your volunteering organisation.

In this section, we aim to capture the general principles of a supportive role and culture that offers encouragement and guidance. You can find out more about specific mentoring and buddy arrangements in our [External Resources](#).

Here are some examples of what *is* a supportive role, and what *isn't*. You can use these examples to guide the support and culture of your organisation when onboarding and welcoming new volunteers, whilst also identifying where a more professional or specialised service is more suitable.

| Types of supportive roles                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | What it isn't                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>✓ Mentor</b> - Develops a mentoring relationship with the mentee, providing guidance, support, and sharing volunteer specific experiences. Takes a more hands-on approach compared to other roles.</li><li>➤ <b>✓ Buddy</b> - Offers friendship, companionship, and support to the volunteer. Helps new volunteers feel welcomed and included in the</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>✗ Coaching</b> – coaches typically work with their clients for a limited period. Their sole focus is strengthening or eliminating specific behaviours from the here and now. They are task-driven with a focus on performance-based outcomes. Supportive roles are on a more equal footing, acting to problem-solve and listen in a collaborative manner.</li></ul> |

volunteering community.

- ✓ **Advisor** – provides advice, guidance, and feedback. The advisor shares their experience and expertise (where appropriate) and acts as a sounding board for ideas and plans.
- ✓ **Cheerleader** – offers encouragement and support to help new volunteers get out of their comfort zone and try new things. The cheerleader celebrates successes, empathises with disappointments, and helps new volunteers understand when things don't go to plan.
- ✓ **Truth-Teller** – supports new volunteers to consider and navigate decisions and actions to better understand situations and problem-solve. The truth-teller may also provide honest (but compassionate) feedback to volunteers to encourage personal development.
- ✓ **Researcher** – seeks out resources to help a new volunteer with personal development and growth, such as recommending websites, books, or other learning tools.
- ✗ **Counselling** – counsellors are trained professionals who support individuals in a clinical setting. Counselling is often problem-focused, helping the client resolve deeply personal issues and mental health management. While supportive roles typically cannot give clinical advice, they can offer a listening ear and share their life experiences to support the new volunteer.
- ✗ **Parenting** – parents are invested in the well-being and outcomes of their children and are a heavily involved and enduring aspect of someone's life. A supportive role in a volunteering context is less involved, allowing for more space for the natural consequences of actions (or inaction).
- ✗ **Teaching** – teachers use instruction and demonstration to impart knowledge in a formal setting. Teaching often involves detailed lesson plans and assessment methods. On the other hand, support in this context is informal and relational in nature, whereby a supportive figure shares knowledge from their lived experience. Teaching is more focused on how to do something, whereas support in this context focuses on why it is useful.

### Key Takeaway

- A supportive relationship and culture are key to **facilitating** and **navigating** a new role for an autistic volunteer in the onboarding process.

## Three Practical Tips to Onboarding

Below are three tips that can help to facilitate the onboarding process for an autistic volunteer.

These can be implemented during and prior to the onboarding process, clarifying the nature of any expectations and tasks in a new volunteering role.

We have focused on recommendations that will save you a significant amount of time during the onboarding process for **all volunteers** and are easy to implement.

| Tip                                                           | What and why?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | How can I support autistic volunteers?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Make the most out of location tours</b>                    | <p>Location tours are simply guiding a new volunteer through the physical layout and facilities of a volunteering role.</p> <p>This creates an opportunity to use your understanding of autism to address any concerns and familiarise an autistic volunteer with a new environment.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be flexible – you can provide location tours in-person or online <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Think about implementing pre-recorded virtual tours</li> <li>○ Use a phone or online meeting software to conduct an online tour</li> <li>○ Provide a map of the facilities and space in advance</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Proactively highlight sensory areas that might be present open the conversation to any preferences or sensitivities.</li> </ul>                                                                                           |
| <b>Provide step-by-step instructions with visual supports</b> | <p>Volunteering tasks can often be broken down into several key steps.</p> <p>Providing written and numbered instructions supported with visual images clearly demonstrates how to complete a task in a volunteering role.</p>                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display simple instructions with visual support around a volunteering space near where a task will be completed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Think about any tasks you explain to a new volunteer (sometimes more than once!)</li> <li>○ Examples may be operating lighting, starting a coffee machine or anything related to the role.</li> <li>○ Use colour coding and symbols where possible to make things even in clearer</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop a simple and easy to read guide or manual that new volunteers can use</li> </ul> |

|                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | that covers each aspect of a volunteering role.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Use scripts to model social interactions</b> | <p>Volunteering roles often require social interactions.</p> <p>You can support an autistic volunteer by giving written guidance on how to respond to specific interactions within a volunteering role.</p> <p>This could be answering a phone, responding to a forum post or supporting a member of the community.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify common social interactions in a volunteering role</li> <li>• Develop a customised script for how to respond to each situation and encourage new volunteers to use this as a reference</li> <li>• Offer to role-play these scripts with a new volunteer to build confidence</li> </ul> |

### Key Takeaway

- There are **simple and practical** ways that can save you time during the onboarding process through developing resources and strategies to **communicate the expectations and tasks** within a volunteering role.

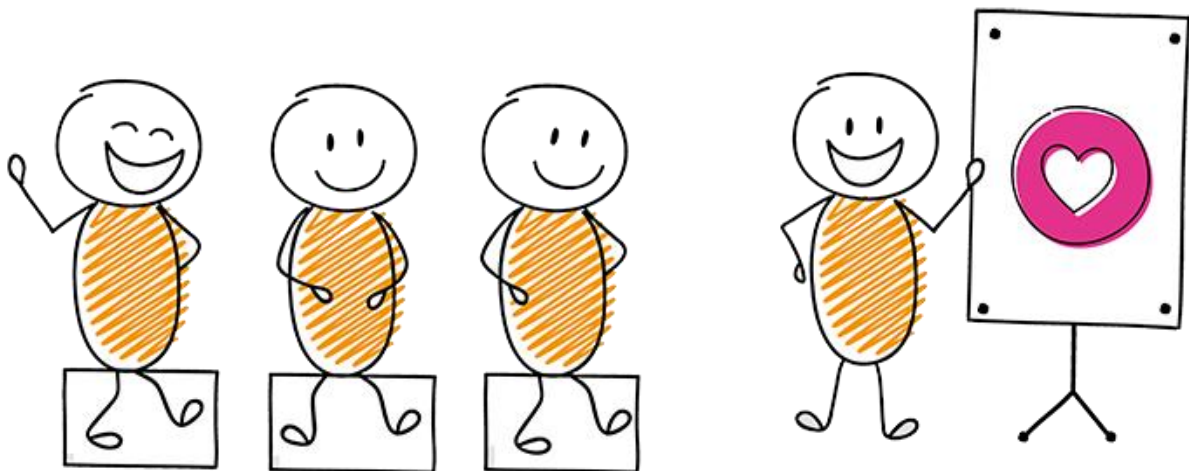
## Supporting Unique Preferences

Maintaining a thriving volunteering partnership involves understanding individual and unique preferences. Early on in these resources we briefly described how autistic individuals may have their own set of unique preferences and sensitivities. These often relate to sensory sensitivities, communication styles and thinking preferences.

Our aim so far has been to provide you with enough information to identify these preferences through role listings, descriptions, and a focus on open communication. Our templates and recommended questions have all focused on capturing these details.

Within this section, we will be providing a bit more context and giving some practical examples of what this might look like in a volunteering role.

We have structured our information to give you a **practical understanding** of what a preference and accompanying support might look like in a volunteering role. However, there are many different ways describing and accommodating unique preferences in the autistic community. We have provided you with additional links in our [External Resources](#) that relate to each preference and to supplement the information we have provided.



### Key Takeaway

- We have given you enough information to increase your understanding, but there are many more sources of information in our **External Resources** section.

## Communication Styles

Members of the autistic community may share similarities in their communication style. For example, autistic communication may look like:

- Different eye contact preferences, such as avoiding direct eye contact.
- Varied facial expressions and body language.
- Experiencing uncertainty when navigating unwritten social rules and workplace culture, such as work jokes and banter.
- Being straightforward in dialogue and taking conversation literally.

Sometimes this style of communication may not align with standard social conventions, such as maintaining eye contact during conversations. It's important to remember that while responses to social cues may be different among autistic individuals, they are likely to be just as engaged in conversation.

Many of our resources have already covered communicating with the autistic community on a broader level, so we focused on a few simple conversational tips below.

These aim to bridge the gap and **meet your autistic conversation partner halfway** to connect different communication styles.

| Communication Tip                                             | What you can do                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Take the time to understand and develop a relationship</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Avoid assumptions when it comes to different emotional reactions and facial expressions</li><li>➤ Ask for clarification if you are unsure of a response in a social situation</li><li>➤ Give a relationship time to develop!</li></ul>                                                 |
| <b>Understand differences in non-verbal communication</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Be attentive to differences in non-verbal communication and understand how they may differ</li><li>➤ Respect individual differences in eye contact and physical space</li></ul>                                                                                                        |
| <b>Be literal and flexible</b>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Adjust your communication style to be more direct, literal and concrete</li><li>➤ Offer additional support when explaining concepts (written and visual aids)</li><li>➤ Allow for extended response time to give autistic volunteers space to think and respond to questions</li></ul> |

### Key Takeaway

- **Take the time** to learn how an individual communicates, especially for autistic volunteers who may have unique ways of expressing themselves!

## Sensory Sensitivities

Sensory sensitivities relate to anything you can touch, taste, see, hear or smell. Within the autistic community, [approximately 69% to 95% of autistic individuals have unique sensory needs](#).

While each sensory experience is unique, there are some common ways that an autistic individual can process different sensations:

| Sensory Process                   | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sensory Over-Responsivity</b>  | A <b>profound and heightened</b> response to sensory input, which can often lead to avoidance and increased awareness of a particular sensation. This could be a sensitivity to light, textures of products and wearing items of clothing.                                          |
| <b>Sensory Under-Responsivity</b> | There may be situations where an autistic volunteer may be <b>slower or less reactive</b> when responding to sensory input, such as a dulled response to pain or awareness of surroundings.                                                                                         |
| <b>Sensory Seeking</b>            | Autistic individuals may <b>prefer</b> certain sensory sensations, leading to an interest or fascination in certain sensory experiences. This could include preferences for tactile sensations (e.g., water, sand, sensory toys/tools) or patterns (e.g., a focus on bright lights) |

Within a volunteering role, support is likely to be given in response to a sensory over-responsivity or under-responsivity. Sensory-seeking behaviour is covered further within our [External Resources](#).

Our upcoming table provides a list of examples and potential ways of accommodating sensory preferences. We aim to give you a general understanding of *what* a sensory preference is and how you can support an autistic volunteer in this context.

Importantly, there will always be an element of sensory input in a volunteering role. It's impossible to eliminate or enhance all sounds, smells or visual aspects of an environment! However, it is possible to make these sensory inputs more **predictable and manageable** for an autistic volunteer.

### Key Takeaways

- You don't need to remove a sensory aspect of a volunteering role, just **reduce sensory input!**

| Sensory Sensitivity                  | What is it?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Example of Sensory Supports                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Visual Sensitivity</b>            | <p>Certain aspects of the visual environment can cause discomfort for autistic volunteers. Think about anything that would enter someone's vision – lighting, people traffic and patterns.</p> <p>Some examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bright or flickering lights</li> <li>• Excessive visual clutter</li> <li>• Contrasting patterns and colours, such as flooring patterns.</li> <li>• People traffic can be receptions, hallways or kitchens that have a high level of movement.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Lighting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Where possible, alter the level of lighting so that it is suitable for autistic volunteers. This could be dimming or increasing brightness, depending on the individual.</li> <li>➤ Consider the use of tinted glasses or hats indoors where necessary to manage light sensitivity in particularly bright environments.</li> <li>➤ Explore the possibility of controllable lighting in the volunteering space if appropriate.</li> </ul> <p><b>High traffic areas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Implement clear directional signage in high traffic areas, these can be as simple as an arrow to the location (e.g. Toilets →)</li> <li>➤ Consider the physical layout of a volunteering space, and how you can reduce people traffic through the placement of furniture and other objects</li> <li>➤ Actively place autistic volunteers away (or towards) high traffic areas such as receptions and meeting rooms, depending on their sensitivities</li> </ul> |
| <b>Smell &amp; Odour Sensitivity</b> | <p>Some odours and smells can be particularly strong for some autistic volunteers. We all have our likes and dislikes when it comes to smells, but certain odours may be particularly sensitive for an autistic volunteer.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p><b>Strong Odours &amp; Smells</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Consider using handheld air freshener instead of an automatic system if a particular scent is off-putting, increasing control and predictability.</li> <li>➤ If an autistic volunteer is sensitive to strong person or food related odours (e.g., perfume, cologne, cigarette smoke), encourage other staff members to be conscious of an autistic volunteers' sensitivities.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

|                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                            | <p>Some examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perfumes, air freshener or other role-specific odours (e.g., chemical smells).</li> <li>• Certain food odours</li> <li>• Multiple odours at the same time, such as in kitchen/meal break areas</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                             | <p><b>Role-Related Odours</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increase airflow to a particularly smelly volunteering environments, using fans, windows and air-conditioning.</li> <li>➤ Nose plugs can be a viable option. However, depending on a volunteer's preferences, it may be more appropriate to revisit the role and match sensory sensitivities to a more suitable aspect of the volunteering experience.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Tactile Sensitivity</b> | <p>Autistic individuals may have tactile sensitivities, making them more sensitive to different textures and physical sensations.</p> <p>Some examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certain fabrics, and clothing labels can be extremely uncomfortable.</li> <li>• The temperature of a given environment and the physical proximity of others.</li> <li>• Touch, such as shaking hands</li> </ul> | <p><b>Role uniform fabrics &amp; labels</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Give autistic volunteers time to become accustomed and practice wearing uniform or equipment required for the role (e.g., safety goggles)</li> <li>➤ Allow volunteers to wear clothing items under the uniform to act as a barrier if it is uncomfortable.</li> <li>➤ Provide alternative clothing options.</li> <li>➤ Consider a long-term goal of using fabrics that are soft, non-irritating and hypoallergenic within your volunteering organisation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Product Textures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Offer the use of gloves for certain tasks and products</li> <li>➤ If appropriate, match sensory-seeking sensations with aligning products and environments</li> </ul> <p><b>Physical proximity and temperature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Show autistic volunteers where there are quiet or private spaces. This can assist autistic people take breaks when required.</li> </ul> |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Autistic volunteers may be sensitive to certain temperatures over and above a mere personal preference, so just keeping an open dialogue on air conditioning, fans and warm clothing is key.</li> <li>➤ Consider the rostering of autistics volunteers. There may be times of the day or week that better, such as early morning when cooler or on a day with less people.</li> </ul>                                                                                                       |
| <b>Auditory Sensitivity</b> | <p>Many autistic individuals experience sound sensitivity, which means they may be more susceptible to being overwhelmed by loud, unexpected or persistent sounds. Some individuals may also prefer noisy environments.</p> <p>Some examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty working in environments with constant background noise.</li> <li>• Unpredictable noises (e.g., fire alarms or phones ringing)</li> </ul> | <p><b>Noisy Environments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Consider placing noisy equipment, machinery or other tools in a specific area that can minimize noise pollution.</li> <li>➤ Prepare autistic volunteers for unexpected sounds and alarms (e.g., fire alarm testing) in advance through notification and planning to make them more predictable.</li> <li>➤ Encourage and promote the use of headphones or ear plugs in appropriate roles to suppress background noise and reduce sensory input.</li> </ul> |

## Thinking Preferences

Recognising and supporting unique ways of thinking is essential for supporting the success and well-being of autistic volunteers. Thinking preferences occur due to the unique ways autistic individuals process information, and are often related to differences in planning, organising, attention and stress-management within a volunteering role.

There are a variety of ways to support differences in processing information, with many of these involving providing additional structure to a task through tools and resources.

With this in mind, we have focused on recommending broad strategies that you can use to support the unique ways autistic individuals process information.

| Process                                        | What you can do                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Task Organization &amp; Planning</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide clear and structured instructions for tasks, breaking them down into smaller steps for clarity</li> <li>➤ Utilise visual aids such as checklists and flowcharts to help with organization</li> <li>➤ Allow for flexibility in task timelines or deadlines to accommodate individual differences in processing, with more time allocated at the front-end of a task to understand and process information.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Time Management &amp; Prioritisation</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Support the use of visual and digital calendars to help with rostering</li> <li>➤ Use reminders and prompts for upcoming deadlines or time-sensitive tasks</li> <li>➤ Encourage and embrace the use of a variety and range personal organization tools, including apps and smart-watches.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Focus &amp; Attention</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Minimise distractions in the environment by reducing excessive noise and visual input to help autistic volunteers concentrate</li> <li>➤ Provide access to a quiet/private space so autistic volunteers can self-regulate.</li> <li>➤ Reduce multi-tasking</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Decision-Making</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Use a flow chart to illustrate decision making processes.</li> <li>➤ Have a clear understanding on how to escalate decisions and who to</li> <li>➤ Develop a clear line of management for decision-making</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Self-Regulation &amp; Stress Management</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Allow for breaks and designated quiet spaces to manage stress</li> <li>➤ Encourage and normalise the use of self-regulation techniques (e.g., deep breathing, sensory tools)</li> <li>➤ If stress or anxiety is persistent, collaborate with the autistic volunteer around the nature of the role and work towards identifying any adjustments where necessary</li> </ul>                                                    |

### Key Takeaway

- A range of broad strategies to a task or role can greatly facilitate the engagement of an autistic volunteer and accommodate a range of different ways of thinking!

## Retaining Autistic Volunteers

You have learned a lot of new information and now you're at the stage of nurturing and growing an existing relationship with an autistic volunteer. We have kept this section simple, providing two resources that aid you in retaining autistic volunteers within your volunteering organisation. This includes a brief check-in structure and a general approach to long-term development.

### Checking In: A Brief Structure

Checking-in with an autistic volunteer is a useful and often necessary way to reflect, adapt and improve any relationship.

While the extent to which you can check-in with a volunteer will be tailored towards your volunteering organisations situation, we have provided some general conversation starters that can be as the basis of an informal check-in to see how an autistic volunteer is going.

This is just one other aspect of opening communication and encouraging dialogue, and is not intended to be a formal review process!

You can print this out as a conversation guide or use it as an agenda when you're engaging with autistic volunteers.



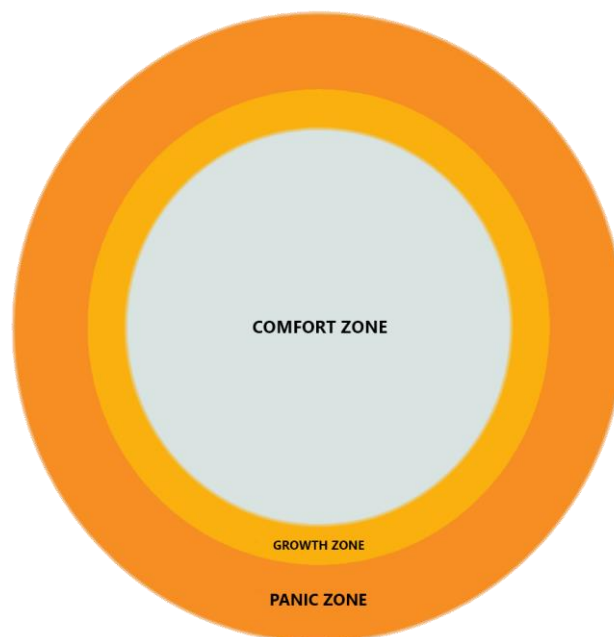
## Long-Term Development

Ongoing and productive relationships allow for the growth of volunteers and organisations alike.

We have used The Growth Zone to visually represent this relationship, reflecting the delicate balance of getting outside one's comfort zone and staying in the ideal environment for learning and development.

While there are many ways you can continue to encourage volunteers and your organisation in the long-term, we have chosen The Growth Zone as a simple way to help frame the progress you have made so far and how you can continually learn and develop into the future.

### *The Growth Zone Diagram*



- **Comfort Zone** – this is where we spend a lot of our time. This space feels easy, safe, stable, and secure. We may be in an environment where things are second-nature to us, or we feel a solid sense of control.

In this zone, you may not develop meaningful engagement with new and exciting opportunities, such as a thriving partnership with the autistic community. You may also forgo opportunities to develop new volunteers and build on their strengths and unique skills.

While this zone may be comfortable, you forgo meaningful opportunities for growth and engagement with a diverse range of communities.

- **Growth Zone** – this is the ideal environment for fostering ongoing and future development. Volunteers and organisations alike are challenged, yet supported, by new experiences and opportunities.

We have aimed at placing you in this zone throughout all of the resources and tools we

have provided so far. We have strived to create a safe yet productive relationship between the volunteering sector and the autistic community.

While this zone might feel different, it is essential for ongoing and future development.

Being in The Growth Zone exposes your organisation to new and exciting opportunities, whilst setting up individual volunteers to demonstrate their potential and achieve success.

- **Panic Zone** – is where we are thrust into an environment vastly different from our norm. It may even be an environment that we have a particular fear about. This space might feel exhausting, stressful, frustrating, anxiety- provoking, and scary.

If you find yourself in this zone, we recommend keeping it simple. You don't need to change every process and procedure to become an accessible and autistic affirming volunteering organisation. Nor do you need to be confused or intimidated by differences among the autistic community. A little bit of communication, respect and understanding is all you need.

Ultimately, what feels comfortable is different for every person. What you can control is your exposure to situations and experiences that can increase the capacity of your volunteering organisation.

Along your future journey, reflect on these zones often and adjust your approach as necessary.

### Key Takeaway

- Moving outside of your comfort zone and **challenging yourself** can give you access to a wide range of diverse and valuable volunteers, **differentiating your volunteering organisation.**

## Concluding Statements

Throughout our journey to developing an accessible volunteering organization, we have reached an important milestone – the end of our final step! Just to recap:

- In Step 1 we began understanding autism and language, embracing the social model of disability. We laid the foundation for a shared understanding that is built on mutual respect and greater awareness of the differences associated with autism.
- During Step 2 we looked at attracting and engaging with the autistic community. We worked towards linking in and developing pathways for relationships to form, acknowledging that autistic volunteers have the potential to add significant value to the volunteering sector.
- And lastly, in Step 3 we covered relationships and how to onboard, support and retain autistic volunteers. We brought together the concepts from the previous steps and covered the finer grained aspects of maintaining a thriving volunteering partnership.

Altogether, we hope you were able to develop your understanding and appreciation of the diversity within the autistic community. While we provided many practical applications to existing processes and procedures, our ultimate aim is going beyond these simple changes and work towards actively creating a volunteering environment that fosters understanding, acceptance, and meaningful participation.

Although your journey within these resources is done, accessibility is an ongoing endeavour that requires continuous learning, adaptation, and open communication. We have provided a list of general [External Resources](#) at the end of this document to accompany you on this adventure.

If you're ever in doubt, we encourage you to revisit these resources and use them to provide context to other members of the volunteering sector and community. We always recommend going back to the [4C's: Communication, Commitment, Collaboration and Curiosity](#). These four values represent an attitude that reflect an organisational culture of respect and accessibility. At the very least, if you are demonstrating these four principles, you are likely to be on the right track.

And if you're still unsure – just ask!

## Key Takeaways

- Use our [External Resources](#) section as a guide for further and more detailed information.
- This is only the end of your journey in these resources, we encourage you to consistently engage and reflect on how you can interact and accommodate diverse communities in the volunteering sector.

## External Resources

### Specific Resources

|                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>What is Autism?</b>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Autism Spectrum Australia: <a href="#">How do we describe Autism?</a></li> <li>Autism Tasmania: <a href="#">What is Autism?</a></li> <li>Amaze: <a href="#">Free online course to understanding autism</a></li> <li>Autism Awareness Australia: <a href="#">Understanding Autism</a></li> </ul> |
| <b>Talking about Autism</b>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Autism CRC: <a href="#">Language Choices and the Autistic Community</a></li> <li>Harvard Health: <a href="#">What is Neurodiversity?</a></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Autistic Strengths</b>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Autism Tasmania: <a href="#">Autism Strengths</a></li> <li>Embrace Autism: <a href="#">Sensory, Cognitive &amp; Behavioural Strengths in Autism</a></li> <li>Spectrum News: <a href="#">Finding Strengths in Autism</a></li> </ul>                                                              |
| <b>Attracting &amp; Engaging Autistic Volunteers</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writer Girl: <a href="#">Accessible Language: what it is and why it matters</a></li> <li>Academy to Innovate HR: <a href="#">9 Inspiring Diversity and Inclusion Statement Examples</a></li> <li>Volunteering Australia: <a href="#">Diversity and Inclusion Statement</a></li> </ul>           |
| <b>Supportive Relationships</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment Autism: <a href="#">The Benefits of Buddying</a></li> <li>Neurodiversity Hub: <a href="#">Mentoring</a></li> <li>Autism CRC: <a href="#">Peer mentoring program for Autistic university students</a></li> </ul>                                                                      |
| <b>Communication Styles</b>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May Institute: <a href="#">Seven Tips for communication with Autistic Adults</a></li> <li>Autism CRC: <a href="#">Language Choices and the Autistic Community</a></li> <li>Autism Tasmania: <a href="#">Social Communication in Autism</a></li> </ul>                                           |
| <b>Sensory Sensitivities</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Autism CRC: <a href="#">Guidelines for Creating Autistic Inclusive Environments</a></li> <li>Autism Tasmania: <a href="#">Sensory Differences</a></li> <li>Autism Awareness Australia: <a href="#">Sensory Processing</a></li> </ul>                                                            |
| <b>Thinking Preferences</b>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Autism Tasmania: <a href="#">Information Processing</a></li> <li>Autism Awareness Centre: <a href="#">Executive Function: what is it, and how do we support it in those with Autism?</a></li> </ul>                                                                                             |

| General Resources                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect):</b>    | <a href="https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/">https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/</a><br><br>Aspect is Australia's largest autism service providers. Their website offers a wealth of resources, guides, and training materials specifically tailored to support organisations in creating inclusive environments for autistic individuals. There is also a multitude of resources covering each stage of develop for an individual with autism. |
| <b>Autism Awareness Australia</b>             | <a href="https://www.autismawareness.com.au/">https://www.autismawareness.com.au/</a><br><br>Autism Awareness Australia is a national organisation dedicated to increasing awareness and understanding of autism. Their website provides resources and information for organisations seeking to support autistic individuals and raise awareness of the nature of autism and increasing accessibility and a large-scale.                       |
| <b>Autism CRC</b>                             | <a href="https://www.autismcrc.com.au/">https://www.autismcrc.com.au/</a><br><br>The Autism Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) is a collaboration of researchers, industry partners, and autistic individuals in Australia. Their website offers research findings, practical resources, and training materials to support organisations in creating inclusive environments for autistic individuals.                                           |
| <b>Australian Network on Disability (AND)</b> | <a href="https://www.and.org.au/">https://www.and.org.au/</a><br><br>AND is an organization that promotes the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace. Their website provides resources, guides, and training programs that can help organisations effectively support and accommodate the autistic community.                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Autism Queensland:</b>                     | <a href="https://autismqld.com.au/">https://autismqld.com.au/</a><br><br>Autism Queensland is a state-based organization providing support and resources for individuals with autism and their families. Their website offers resources and training programs to assist organisations in creating inclusive environments for autistic volunteers.                                                                                              |
| <b>Amaze:</b>                                 | <a href="https://www.amaze.org.au/">https://www.amaze.org.au/</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

|                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                       | Amaze is the peak body for autism in Victoria, Australia. Their website provides resources, toolkits, and training programs to assist organisations in supporting autistic individuals in a variety of settings.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Empower Autism</b>                 | <a href="https://empowerautism.org.au/">https://empowerautism.org.au/</a><br><br>Empower Autism is a well-established, not-for-profit organisation that provides information, support and capacity development services to autistic people, together with their parents, carers and families. We are strong advocates of the benefits of peer led support and we value the active participation of those with lived experience of autism. |
| <b>Yellow Ladybugs</b>                | <a href="https://www.yellowladybugs.com.au/">https://www.yellowladybugs.com.au/</a><br><br>Yellow Ladybugs is a non-profit organization that supports and empowers autistic girls and women in Australia. They offer mentorship programs, social events, workshops, and resources to promote self-acceptance and understanding.                                                                                                           |
| <b>Autism Connect</b>                 | <a href="https://www.autismconnect.org.au/">https://www.autismconnect.org.au/</a><br><br>Autism Connect is an online directory and resource hub that connects individuals with autism, their families, and professionals to relevant support services and resources across Australia.                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Autism Advocacy Australia (A4)</b> | <a href="https://a4.org.au/">https://a4.org.au/</a><br><br>A4 is an advocacy organization that promotes the rights and interests of individuals with autism and Asperger's syndrome. They provide information, resources, and advocacy support to ensure individuals with autism are included and supported in all aspects of life.                                                                                                       |

## Common Autism Related Terms: A Glossary

This glossary contains autism-specific terms to help promote a shared understanding with the autistic community.

It's important to acknowledge that language is dynamic, and this list is not set in concrete. Be mindful of individual preferences when using any of the language contained in this glossary.

| Term                                           | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Autism</b>                                  | A neurodevelopmental condition that is characterised by a range of unique characteristics in communication, interests and routines, sensory processing and executive functioning.                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Autism-adjacent</b>                         | A term used to describe individuals who do not have an autism diagnosis but share common values and experiences with autistic individuals.                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Communication Styles</b>                    | Common ways in which autistic individuals may express themselves or interact with others.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Executive Functioning</b>                   | A set of thinking processes that are involved in planning, organising, initiating, and completing tasks. These processes help with organising our environments, thoughts and actions. Differences in executive functioning are commonly experienced by individuals with autism and other neurodivergent conditions. |
| <b>Identity first vs Person first language</b> | Refers to the way in which a person's condition or disability is referred to in language. Identity first language prioritises the person's identity as an autistic or neurodivergent person, while person first language prioritises the person over their condition.                                               |

|                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Masking</b>                      | The act of hiding or suppressing one's autistic traits or behaviours in order to fit in with non-autistic social norms. Masking can be mentally and emotionally exhausting for autistic individuals.                               |
| <b>Neurodevelopmental Condition</b> | A condition that affects the development of the nervous system and brain, such as autism, ADHD, or dyslexia.                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Neurodivergent</b>               | Refers to individuals who have neurological differences, including autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other conditions.                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Neurodiversity</b>               | The idea that neurological differences should be recognised and respected as a natural part of human diversity. Different ways of thinking, learning and behaving are treated with respect and not seen as deficits.               |
| <b>Neurotypical</b>                 | Refers to individuals whose neurological development and function are within the typical range.                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Reasonable Adjustments</b>       | Modifications or accommodations that are made to enable individuals with disabilities to participate fully in society, such as making changes to the physical or sensory environments.                                             |
| <b>Sensory Sensitivities</b>        | The different ways in which individuals process sensory information, such as touch, taste, smell, sound, and sight. Autistic individuals may have sensory processing differences throughout their daily lives.                     |
| <b>Social Model of Disability</b>   | A model of disability that emphasises the role of societal barriers and attitudes in limiting the participation and inclusion of individuals with disabilities, rather than focusing on the individual's impairment or difference. |

|                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Strengths-Based Approach</b> | An approach that focuses on identifying and building upon an individual's strengths and abilities, rather than focusing solely on their deficits or challenges.                                                                                       |
| <b>Stimming</b>                 | Stimming is the colloquial term for self-stimulatory behaviour. Some autistic individuals stim to regulate sensory input, express excitement, and cope with stress or anxiety. Common stims include rocking, flapping, or repeating words or phrases. |