

People with disability

Partner Organisation	Queenslanders with Disability Network -QDN
Budget	\$8,364.40
Date	May 2022

Where, when, who.

The People with Disability Roundtable was held on 11 May 2022. It was hosted by Queenslanders with Disability Network -QDN, on behalf of Volunteering Queensland.

The Roundtable invited people to collaborate and share their views centred around the calling question “How can we support diverse and freely given participation in our communities?” Participation was either in person at the Roundtable or completion of an online survey.

12 participants attended the face-to-face Roundtable representing a broad range from the disability sector including people with disability, parents and carers, social justice and advocacy organisations, and agencies related to specific disability types including Deaf and hard of hearing, and blind and low vision.

18 people were invited to complete the online survey, 5 people responded, all represented organisations, therefore it cannot be concluded that survey responses reflected the lived experience of people with disability.

Discussion points and highlights

Participants at the face-to-face Roundtable were asked to respond to three questions:

What does a great volunteering experience look like?

- A great volunteering experience sees benefits for the community receiving services and the people giving their time.
- It is an opportunity that is enjoyable, fulfilling, and rewarding that enables growth, networking/sense of community and skills development. There was considerable focus on the additional personal benefits.
- People may volunteer for an organisation as they are interested in the subject matter or cause (such as surf lifesaving) but are only likely to remain connected if there is growth, networking, and skill development; the peripheral benefits that enhance a sense of personal worth and keep people engaged.
- Creating volunteer opportunities that capture this “recipe” maximises the likelihood of having a pool of committed passionate, skilled, and ongoing volunteers.

What gets in the way of people with disabilities having these great experiences?

Several key themes emerged in relation to barriers for people with disability to volunteer including:

Attitude

- positive and negative attitudes towards people with disability, and stigmas associated with disability types
- Tokenism: appearing to include people with disability just to look good vs valuing and respecting the contribution of people with disability

Accessibility and transport

- Getting to and from the venue: how do people with disability get to the venue and who is responsible for meeting the cost? People with disability are often on low incomes and cannot always afford additional transport costs
- Communication barriers – are required supports in place to ensure effective communication?
- Physical access to the venue or location

Skills and training

- Matching skills of the volunteer to the volunteering opportunity
- Valuing the skills and experience that people with disability bring
- Ensuring reasonable adjustments so that the role can be suitable for people with disability

Support

- Helping volunteers to feel confident in performing the role they are volunteering for
- Ensuring support, training, and clarity – ensuring peer leaders are available at the start to help people understand their role and provide orientation.
- Helping people to feel included and valued
- A lack of flexibility or adaptability of program

It is important to consider these factors in the planning and preparation phase and to ensure they are implemented to achieve a smooth, inclusive, and accessible experience for people with disability who volunteer. It is far more positive and effective to prevent people with disability experiencing barriers than to resolve issues after such a negative experience.

What becomes possible when people with disabilities have these great experiences?

Great outcomes can be achieved for volunteers and the community when people with disability have a positive volunteering experience. Benefits include:

- Increased confidence, skills, and productivity
- Inclusive communities where all people have equal opportunities.
- A broader interaction with people with disability creates disability awareness within the community.
- Good news stories and great ambassadors for participation in volunteer opportunities into the future

- Creating a sense of community through common purpose. Personal connections are often made through workplaces and volunteering as a centralised place to meet likeminded people. This secondary benefit helps people to stay connected with their local community.
- Investing time, energy, and resources to ensure a positive volunteering experience for people with disability leads to a greater number of volunteers and significant benefits to all involved.

Recommendations

Specific considerations for ensuring accessible, meaningful, and enjoyable volunteering experiences for people with disability can be broken into three primary issues:

1. Volunteer organisation staff knowledge, awareness, and attitudes about people with disability
 - Consult with people to understand how to best to support them during volunteering.
 - Ensure you have processes in place to inform, orientate and support people with disability to participate.
 - Ensure you engage a person with a disability in a meaningful and purposeful way, rather than a tokenistic attempt to be seen to involve people with disability.
 - Ensure volunteering opportunities are flexible to meet the needs of the individual, not just for the individual to meet the needs of the project or program.
 - Ensure there is a clear point of contact within the organisation to give confidence to the volunteer with disability
 - Be clear on expectations of the role requirements. Provide opportunity for self-reflection on completion of volunteering opportunities to improve how the service operates. Think about how that is collected, sometimes individual feedback may be best, other times it might be best with a team of volunteers, to gain insight from each other.
 - Commit to meaningful staff development, view feedback as an opportunity for improvement, particularly in relation to accessibility and inclusion.
2. The infrastructure required to perform the volunteering such as office workspaces, vehicles, community centres etc where the roles are located
 - Consult with people to understand how to make reasonable adjustments to the workspace related to their disability
 - Minimise red tape and bureaucracy involved in volunteering, the process must be as easy as possible
 - Utilise the lived experience of people with disability to test and inform infrastructure and be willing to adapt to suit needs
 - Commit to meaningful process and infrastructure improvements, view feedback as an opportunity for improvement.
3. Volunteering opportunities provide more than just something to do
 - Volunteering needs to provide skill development
 - Volunteering can provide pathways towards paid employment
 - Volunteering can provide networking and community development opportunities