
Successful Volunteer Recruitment: The Definitive Guide

How charities, sport, events, food rescue and government programs can recruit more volunteers and get them to their first shift, faster

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

VOLUNTEER ONBOARDING

What does successful volunteer recruitment look like in Australia?

Successful volunteer recruitment in Australia means filling the right roles with the right people, then getting them from application to first shift before their interest fades. Fewer Australians volunteer through organisations than a decade ago, but those who do are giving more hours. The organisations that win are the ones that make saying yes easy.

This guide is for volunteer managers, coordinators and program leads running large or complex programs across Australia, from national charities and sport federations to food rescue networks, major events and local government. It covers the current state of volunteering in Australia, who is volunteering now, how to reach them, and how to stop losing recruits between their first click and their first shift.

It draws on the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics and Volunteering Australia data, and on what Rosterfy sees across the Australian organisations that run their volunteer programs on the platform.



Key takeaways

01 Fewer people, more hours.

About 5 million Australians volunteered through an organisation in 2025 (22.6% of people aged 15+), down from 36.2% in 2010. Yet formal volunteering hours rose to 618 million, up from 490 million in 2020.

02 Cost is a real barrier.

Over half of volunteers (54.4%) paid out of pocket to volunteer in 2025, and almost half were not reimbursed. Recruitment messaging and processes need to respect people's time and money.

03 New recruits are a small slice.

Only 11.5% of formal volunteers started for the first time in 2025. Most programs rely on a long-serving core, so converting every new applicant matters.

04 Speed wins.

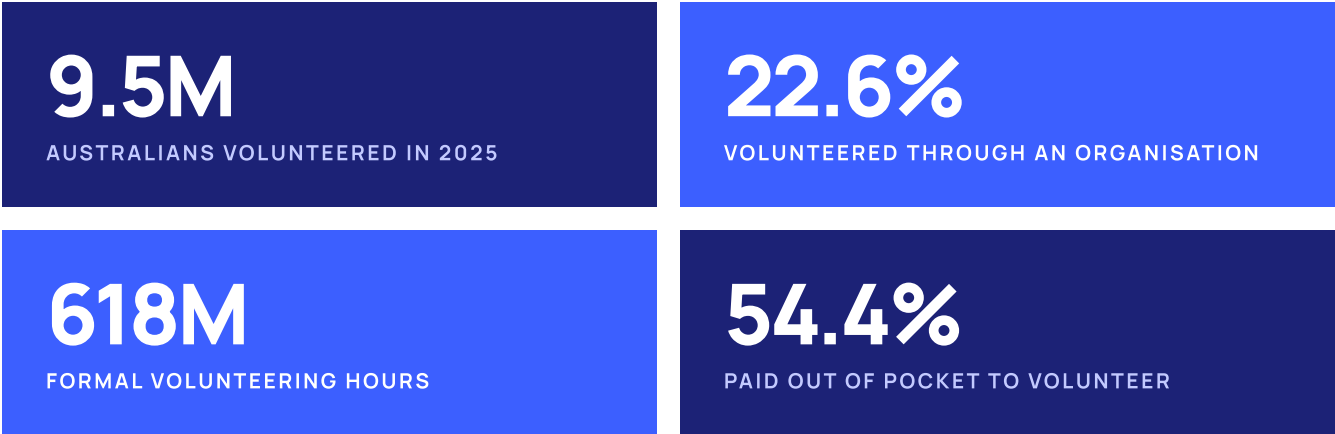
The longer the gap between application and first shift, the more recruits you lose. Removing manual steps is the single biggest recruitment lever most large programs have.

05 Data turns recruitment into a repeatable system.

Programs that track where applicants drop out, and why, can fix the leaks instead of simply asking for more volunteers.

How many Australians volunteer, and is the number falling?

Around 9.5 million Australians (42.8% of people aged 15 and over) volunteered formally, informally or both in 2025, according to the ABS General Social Survey. Formal volunteering through an organisation has held steady at about 5 million people since 2020, but the rate is well below its 2010 peak. Recruitment is harder, not impossible.



MEASURE (PEOPLE AGED 15+)	2025 FIGURE
Formal volunteering rate in 2010 (peak)	36.2%
Started formal volunteering for the first time	11.5% of formal volunteers
Volunteered 100+ hours in the year	31.3% of formal volunteers

SOURCE

ABS General Social Survey 2025, summarised by Volunteering Australia (May 2026).

What does this mean for recruitment?

The pool is smaller, but the people in it are committed. Formal volunteering is highest in remote areas (34%) and lowest in major cities (20.9%), and adults aged 35 to 54 are the most likely to volunteer. Sport and recreation organisations attract a third of all formal volunteers.

Cost of living is part of the story. Over half of volunteers covered their own expenses in 2025, most often for transport, and 15.6% paid for memberships, licences or screening checks. Volunteering Australia also notes that the 2026 fuel crisis has put further pressure on transport-dependent organisations, which is likely to show up in the next survey.

01

Every applicant is more valuable. With fewer new entrants, losing someone to a slow or confusing process costs more than it used to.

02

Flexibility and short commitments open the door. The most common formal commitment is 1 to 20 hours a year, so one-off and event-based roles are a legitimate entry point, not a lesser one.

03

Remove hidden costs where you can. Covering screening check fees, offering transport support or rostering close to home all reduce the barriers people weigh before saying yes.



The National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033 sets the sector-wide direction for addressing these challenges and is worth reading alongside this guide.



What recruitment strategies work best for large Australian programs?

The strategies that work best are specific, not general. Define each role clearly, tell people why your cause matters, reach them where they already are, and make applying quick. For large programs, the biggest gains usually come from your existing database and from removing friction, rather than from new advertising.

STRATEGY	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE
Define each role	Every role has a clear purpose, time commitment, location and any checks required
Sell the cause, not the vacancy	Lead with the impact the volunteer will make in their own community
Re-engage your database	Offer new roles to past and current volunteers before going to market
Use every channel	Website, social, community groups, local media and volunteer centres in each state
Partner with employers	Corporate volunteering programs bring groups of skilled volunteers at once
Offer flexibility	One-off, short-shift and event-based roles alongside regular commitments
Say thank you, often	Recognised volunteers stay longer and refer friends
Measure and improve	Track which roles are hardest to fill and where applicants drop out

How do you recruit younger volunteers in Australia?

Recruit younger Australians with short, flexible roles they can find and apply for on their phone, and make the benefits clear: skills, experience for their CV and connection with their community. Young people are volunteering again after the pandemic dip, but they expect the experience to be as easy as any other app they use.

29.7%

OF 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS VOLUNTEERED FORMALLY IN 2023

24.3%

OF PEOPLE CURRENTLY STUDYING VOLUNTEERED FORMALLY IN 2025

Volunteering Australia reports that 29.7% of 18 to 24 year olds volunteered through an organisation in 2023, around 680,000 people, up from 25% in 2022. People currently studying volunteered formally at 24.3% in 2025, above the national average. Younger volunteers are more likely to give time online or in the field, and more likely to choose areas such as animal welfare and health.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR RECRUITMENT



Lead with the benefit to them. Skills, references and work experience matter to a generation entering a competitive job market.



Offer short and flexible commitments. Young volunteers tend to give fewer hours, so one-off and event roles are a natural first step.



Make it mobile. Discovery, application, rostering and shift updates should all work on a phone. A volunteer app removes the friction that loses younger applicants.



Be clear about your mission and values. Younger volunteers want to know what you stand for before they commit.

For detailed tactics on engaging Gen Z volunteers, see our [guide to engaging younger volunteers](#).

How do you make volunteer recruitment more inclusive?

Inclusive recruitment means making sure people from every community can see themselves in your program, understand how to join and afford to take part. In Australia that includes culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, First Nations people, people with disability and people living outside major cities.

The 2025 GSS shows a gap worth closing. 24.1% of people born in Australia volunteered formally, compared with 20.8% of migrants. Yet 32.7% of people who speak a language other than English volunteered informally. The willingness is there. Formal programs are not always reaching it.

24.1%

BORN IN AUSTRALIA, FORMAL

20.8%

MIGRANTS, FORMAL

32.7%SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER
THAN ENGLISH, INFORMAL

PRACTICAL STEPS

01

Remove language barriers. Offer role descriptions, applications and key communications in the languages your community speaks. Rosterfy is available in nine languages.

02

Partner with community organisations. Settlement services, multicultural councils and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations can co-design roles and recruit through trusted networks.

03

Reduce out-of-pocket costs. Covering screening fees and transport helps people for whom cost is the deciding factor.

04

Show diversity in your brand. Your website, social channels and recruitment campaigns should reflect the communities you serve.

05

Measure it. You cannot improve what you cannot see. Capture optional demographic data at application so you can report on who is joining, and who is dropping out, by group.

Being able to report on equity, diversity and inclusion is an increasingly common request from boards, funders and government partners. A volunteer management system that captures this data at the point of application makes that reporting routine rather than a manual exercise.

How can corporate partnerships help you recruit volunteers?

Corporate partnerships give you access to groups of motivated, often skilled volunteers at once, and they work best as long-term relationships with clear mutual benefit. Employers want meaningful activities for their people and reportable impact for their ESG and social investment commitments. You want reliable volunteers. Design the partnership around both.

There is capacity to tap. Employed Australians volunteered formally at above-average rates in 2025 (23.4% of full-time and 25% of part-time workers). Volunteering Australia's 2019 corporate volunteering snapshot found most surveyed companies ran a volunteering program and intended to grow participation, yet significant corporate volunteering capacity went unused each year.

“

A corporate relationship is exactly that, a relationship. It's about providing mutual value and those relationships really need to be nurtured.

Chloe Nguyen
General Manager Marketing and Memberships, The Common Good



What a strong partnership needs

WHAT A STRONG PARTNERSHIP NEEDS	WHY IT MATTERS
Aligned values	Employees engage more when the cause fits their company's culture and community focus
Clear goals on both sides	Agree on hours, roles, skills and outcomes before the first activity
Easy group sign-up	Team leaders should be able to register a group, not 20 individuals one by one
Visible impact reporting	Hours, activities and outcomes your partner can include in their ESG and community reporting
Skilled roles	Marketing, finance and technology volunteers can add value well beyond a single day



The benefits run both ways: a steady pipeline of volunteers, new skills, wider awareness of your cause, and networks that can open doors to funding.



What is a good volunteer application conversion rate?

Most large volunteer programs Rosterfy works with aim to convert 30 to 40% of applicants into volunteers who attend a shift, and many fall well short without a structured application process. Your conversion rate is the clearest measure of whether your recruitment is working, because it shows how many interested people you lose along the way.

30–40%

TARGET APPLICANT-TO-SHIFT CONVERSION

HOW DO YOU CALCULATE IT?

Conversion rate (%) = (Attended shifts ÷ Total applications) × 100

What counts as good depends on your program. Rates are naturally lower where roles require:



a Working with Children Check or police check



an extensive onboarding or training process



interviews or specialist skills



significant cost to the volunteer



Where do applicants drop out?

Most programs lose people at the same points:

01

Discovery. Roles are hard to find or poorly described.

02

Application. Long forms, repeated questions or no mobile option.

03

Waiting. Days or weeks pass with no update while checks and references are processed manually.

04

Onboarding. Training and compliance steps are unclear or out of order.

05

First shift. No reminder, unclear location or no confirmation.

The fix is visibility and speed. Build a distinct application journey for each role, track how many people move through each stage, and send automated updates so no one waits without hearing from you. Rosterfy's automated recruitment and onboarding does this, and a branded volunteer portal lets applicants check their own progress instead of calling your team.

The reward is twofold: more recruits reach their first shift, and coordinators spend their time with volunteers instead of chasing paperwork. Rosterfy customers automate up to 75% of the end-to-end volunteer journey.

75%

OF THE VOLUNTEER
JOURNEY AUTOMATED

How are Australian organisations improving volunteer recruitment?

Australian organisations across charities, food rescue, sport and major events are recruiting faster by automating screening, onboarding and communications. The common result: applicants reach their first shift sooner, and coordinators process far more applications in the same time.

ORGANISATION	SECTOR	RECRUITMENT RESULT
Lifeline Australia	Health and cause-led charity	Application admin cut by 50%. Recruitment office processes 10 to 12 applications an hour, up from 3 to 5. More than 5,000 active volunteers, with automated Working with Children Check screening and renewal reminders Source ↗
OzHarvest	Food rescue	OzHarvest moved from managing volunteers in Salesforce to a purpose-built volunteer management solution, Rosterfy, improving the volunteer experience and reducing onboarding time by 80%. Source ↗
SecondBite / FareShare	Food rescue	Utilised Rosterfy to reduce the time spent onboarding volunteers from 10 weeks to 4 weeks using automations. Source ↗
Pont3 (TCS Sydney Marathon)	Major events	Pont3, operators of the TCS Sydney Marathon created a central volunteer management program for their national events calendar, which saw their program grow by 500%. Source ↗
Spark Event Group (The Australian Open)	Major events	Spark Event Group recruited large numbers of workforce for The Australian Open with a 99% attendance rate. Source ↗
Golf Australia	Sport federation	Golf Australia established a national volunteer program to support its extensive events calendar, using Rosterfy's automated onboarding to reduce manual administration by 75%. Source ↗

80%

FASTER ONBOARDING,
OZHARVEST

500%

PROGRAM GROWTH, TCS
SYDNEY MARATHON

99%

ATTENDANCE, AUSTRALIAN
OPEN



After one week of using Rosterfy, our Recruitment Office can process 10-12 volunteer applications per hour, as opposed to 3-5 volunteers per hour, through our previous system.

Voula Sofiou
Volunteer Delivery Lead, Lifeline Australia

[READ THE CASE STUDY](#)

What do these programs have in common?



A single front door. Every role is listed in one branded portal, so applicants know where to go.



Role-specific journeys. Each role has its own checks, training and approvals, so no one does steps they do not need.



Compliance built in, not bolted on. Screening checks are triggered and tracked automatically before anyone is rostered.



Automated updates. Applicants hear from the program at every stage without a coordinator sending each message.



Integrated data. Volunteer records connect to the CRM and screening providers already in use.

OzHarvest: 80% faster volunteer onboarding and nationwide growth without added headcount

Opportunities

Search by city or postal code

100

Kilometers

Location

Search

Clear Search



FOOD RESCUE
Van Assistant



FOOD RESCUE
Assistant



FOOD RESCUE
Regional Assistant

OzHarvest uses Rosterfy to promote their volunteer opportunities via a public opportunities page on their website.

80%

REDUCTION IN TIME TO
ONBOARD NEW VOLUNTEERS

30 hrs

SAVED PER WEEK ON MANUAL
ADMIN

120K

VOLUNTEER HOURS COMPLETED
IN 2025

THE CHALLENGE

Around 3,500 volunteers make up 90% of OzHarvest's workforce. Volunteers were managed in Salesforce, which wasn't mobile-friendly, and coordinators chased certificates, e-learning and police checks by email, one volunteer at a time.

THE SOLUTION

Onboarding, scheduling and communications moved into Rosterfy, with a two-way Salesforce integration. Onboarding now takes around one week instead of up to six, and volunteer hours have grown 10% year on year without adding coordinators.

“Rosterfy has meant our coordinators spend less time chasing paperwork and more time actually talking to our volunteers, and that personal interaction is so much more meaningful.”

Lynda Baker
Head of Volunteering, OzHarvest

[READ THE CASE STUDY](#)

What screening and compliance checks do Australian volunteers need?

The checks depend on the role and the state or territory. Volunteers working with children usually need a Working with Children Check, and many roles involving vulnerable people, money or sensitive information require a National Police Check. Each state and territory runs its own WWCC scheme, so national programs must manage several sets of rules at once.

Screening is where recruitment most often stalls. Checks take time, applicants forget to upload documents, and coordinators chase paperwork by email. Handled well, compliance protects your volunteers and the people they support without becoming a bottleneck.

REQUIREMENT	WHAT TO GET RIGHT
Working with Children Check	Check the scheme for each state or territory you operate in, record card numbers and expiry dates, and remind volunteers before renewal
National Police Check	Integrate with your screening provider so checks are requested and results recorded automatically
Role-specific training	Make training a required step before rostering for roles that need it, such as food safety or first aid
Privacy and data handling	Collect only what you need, store it securely and meet your obligations under the Privacy Act 1988
Data hosting	For many government and health organisations, Australian-hosted data is a procurement requirement



The most effective programs make each check a gate in the role's application journey. A volunteer simply cannot be rostered until their checks and training are complete, which removes the risk of manual oversight. Rosterfy hosts Australian customer data in Australia and integrates with screening providers including National Crime Check.



This is general information, not legal advice. Confirm your obligations with the relevant state or territory screening body.

What trends will shape volunteer recruitment in Australia?

Three trends are reshaping recruitment: shorter and more flexible volunteering, AI-assisted administration, and growing pressure to report impact. Programs that adapt will recruit from a wider pool and keep coordinators focused on people rather than paperwork.



Flexible and episodic volunteering.

With most formal volunteers giving 1 to 20 hours a year, one-off, event and micro-volunteering roles are becoming a core recruitment channel rather than a side option.



AI in volunteer management.

AI can help draft role descriptions, tailor messaging to different audiences and match volunteers to roles based on skills, availability and location. The mission and voice should still be your own.



Recognition that keeps people coming back.

Milestones, badges and personal thank-yous turn first-time volunteers into repeat volunteers and advocates who recruit their friends.



Impact reporting.

Boards, funders, government partners and corporate sponsors increasingly expect hours, outcomes and diversity data. Programs that capture this from the first application can report without a scramble at year end.

Frequently asked questions

How many people volunteer in Australia?

About 9.5 million Australians, or 42.8% of people aged 15 and over, volunteered formally, informally or both in 2025. Around 5 million of them volunteered through an organisation, according to the ABS General Social Survey.

Is volunteering declining in Australia?

The rate of formal volunteering has fallen from 36.2% in 2010 to 22.6% in 2025, but it has held steady since 2020. Total hours volunteered through organisations rose to 618 million in 2025, up from 490 million in 2020.

What is the biggest barrier to recruiting volunteers?

Cost and time are major barriers. Over half of Australian volunteers paid out of pocket to volunteer in 2025. Within programs, slow or manual application and screening processes lose many recruits before their first shift.

What is a good volunteer conversion rate?

Most large volunteer programs Rosterfy works with aim to convert 30 to 40% of applicants into volunteers who attend a shift. Programs requiring checks, interviews or extensive training will typically sit lower.

Do volunteers in Australia need a Working with Children Check?

Volunteers in child-related roles usually need a Working with Children Check. Each state and territory runs its own scheme with its own rules and exemptions, so check the requirements wherever your volunteers work.

Sources

General Social Survey 2025: at a glance fact sheet, Volunteering Australia, May 2026, summarising the ABS General Social Survey 2025

General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2025, Australian Bureau of Statistics

Youth Volunteering Key Statistics, Volunteering Australia, July 2024

Corporate Volunteering in Australia: a snapshot, Volunteering Australia and Corporate Citizenship, July 2019

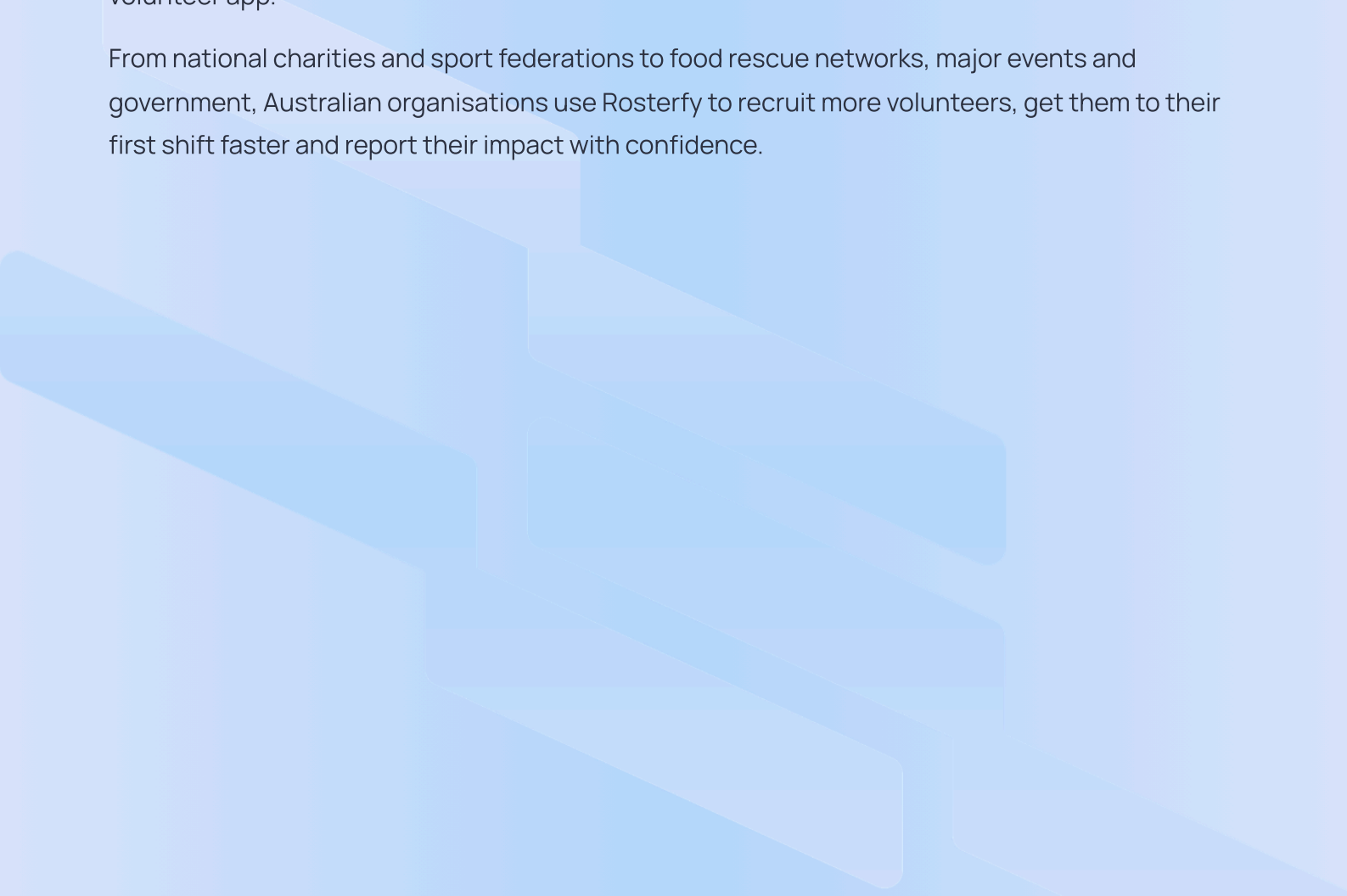
National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033, Volunteering Australia

Rosterfy customer data and [case studies](#)

About Rosterfy

Rosterfy is volunteer management software built in Melbourne for organisations running large, complex volunteer programs. It brings recruitment, screening, onboarding, rostering, communications and reporting into one platform, with Australian data hosting and a volunteer app.

From national charities and sport federations to food rescue networks, major events and government, Australian organisations use Rosterfy to recruit more volunteers, get them to their first shift faster and report their impact with confidence.



If you manage hundreds or thousands of volunteers across multiple roles, sites or programs, book a demo to see how your recruitment journey could run on Rosterfy.



BOOK A DEMO AT [ROSTERFY.COM](https://rosterfy.com)