



GUIDE

Build v Buy - Volunteer Management Software

What's right for your organisation?

Weighing up the advantages and risks in building a custom VMS over buying a **ready-to-go** solution.



Solving the volunteer management problem

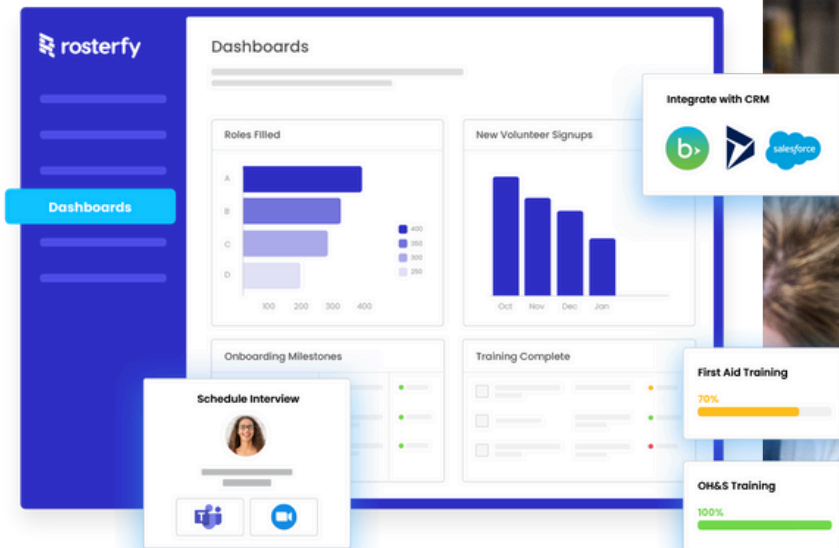
There is no doubt that running a significant volunteer team brings its own unique organisational challenges.

Without the right software tools, it can quickly become a logistical nightmare: scheduling shifts, tracking hours, coordinating comms. The process soon becomes a complex one.

Well-structured Volunteer Management Software (VMS) will help alleviate many of these headaches by streamlining processes, providing useful data insights, and delivering an engaging experience for both volunteers and staff.

But when it comes to implementing a VMS, organisations face one key decision: should we build our own system from scratch or buy an existing platform that can be tailored to our needs?

While the idea of a custom-built solution might sound appealing, there are several critical factors to consider, including cost, time, security, and maintenance.



Pictured above: Rosterfy's Volunteer Management Software



Calculating the true price of building your own VMS



Should we buy this software or should we build it?



For enterprise organisations, the question can be less around "can we do it?" and more "should we do it?"

At first glance, building your own VMS may seem like the perfect way to get exactly what you need, without compromise. However, the reality is far more complex. **Building a complete system to recruit, screen, schedule, engage with, and report on volunteer activity is a monumental task.**

Developing a custom software solution means:

- Hiring developers (either in-house or outsourced)
- Investing in infrastructure
- Committing to technical support for the life of that VMS.

The initial development costs will be significant. But that's just the beginning. Once built, the system will require:

- Continuous updates
- Security patches
- Technical support
- Bug fixes
- Feature updates to meet the changing needs of your organisation.

Maintaining a dedicated development team to keep a VMS running smoothly isn't cheap. Skilled developers command competitive salaries, and you may also need cybersecurity experts to ensure critical data is protected. Even if you hire a third-party development firm, ongoing support contracts can add a hefty recurring cost.

Beyond direct expenses, scope creep—where changes keep getting made during the build phase—can lead to runaway costs and major delays. What started as a simple project can balloon into a multi-year development effort, draining valuable resources that could have been allocated to mission-driven initiatives.

If project delays do eventuate, they can reflect badly on the project owners while impacting the delivery of services. A poorly executed VMS could even damage relationships with your community.

In short, building a VMS is not a task for the faint-hearted. It will require a highly experienced software project team to guide the initiative successfully. Realistic cost projections need to be in place for the lifecycle of the technology—not just the build cost.

Choosing a practical, cost-effective alternative

If the thought of building your own VMS is too much, then you're only left with a couple of options. You can buy a one-time license for an existing software solution, or you can go the SaaS route

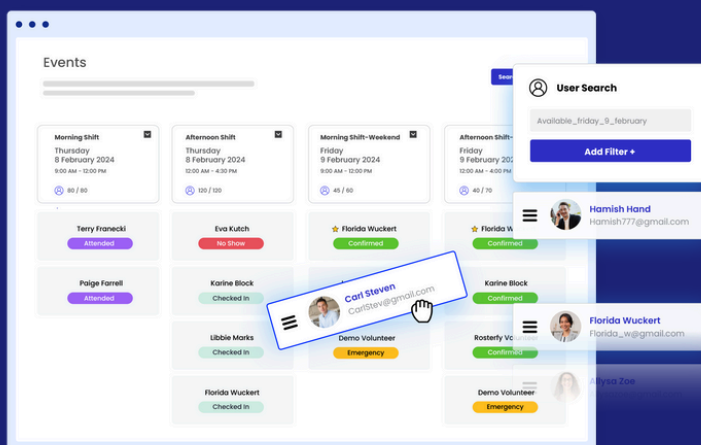
On the surface, the perpetual license option might look like a cost-effective move. You get a turn-key product at a fixed price. You'll be paying the full amount upfront, though—which may be problematic from a cash flow standpoint. And like building from scratch, you still have the ongoing support and maintenance costs that need to be covered. To add additional features, you still need to code things from scratch. This is the major reason why, today, SaaS-based VMS platforms have become so popular.

SaaS: Simplicity is its advantage

A SaaS-based Volunteer Management Software can provide your organisation with a ready-built solution that can easily be tailored to your needs. Unlike custom-coded systems, SaaS platforms come with built-in security, automatic updates, and integrations with other proven tools like CRMs, fundraising software, and accounting systems.

Here's why SaaS is often the better choice than a custom build:

- **Lower upfront costs:** SaaS solutions operate on a subscription model, eliminating the need for a big upfront investment. This makes budgeting more predictable, reducing the risk of unexpected cost blowouts.
- **Rapid deployment:** While building a VMS can take months (or even years), a SaaS platform can be implemented in days or weeks, allowing organisations to start benefiting from the software immediately.
- **No maintenance hassles:** Security, bug fixes, and feature updates are all handled by the provider, eliminating the need for a dedicated in-house development team.
- **Reliability & scalability:** SaaS solutions are cloud-based, ensuring high uptime and data redundancy. They can easily scale as your volunteer program grows.



Pictured above: Rosterfy's Volunteer Management Software



Choosing tried and tested technology

In the case of Rosterfy, our product teams have crafted the product based on the learnings from hundreds of customer use cases. These insights have been continuously fed back into the development of the product over many years. The workflows are tried, tested, and validated—all designed to drive efficiencies and make daily tasks easier for customers.

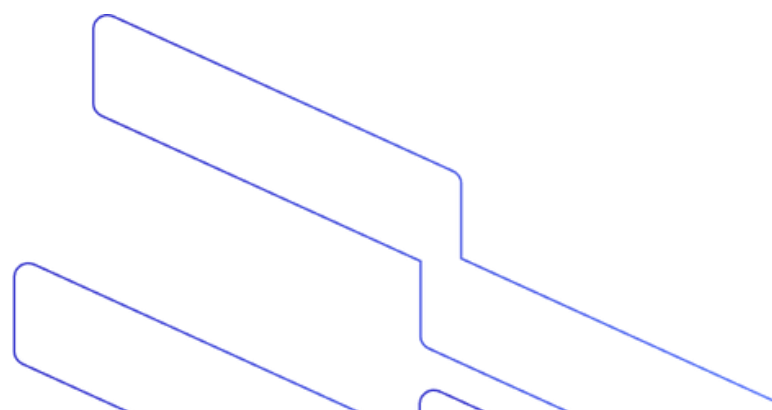
Just like most products, there is a broad spectrum of Volunteer Management Software (VMS). Some are affordable but offer limited customisation and scalability while others are expensive but are very extensive in their product offering - enabling you to consolidate multiple services into one solution.

When choosing the self-build option, you can only build off the knowledge contained with your team. A good SaaS software will flex around a wide number of use cases. This is something an in-house VMS may struggle to do. Because Rosterfy has experience with all types and sizes of organisations across multiple sectors, we've essentially future-proofed the journey for virtually all customer types.

Customisation gives you the best of both worlds

One of the biggest arguments for building a VMS is customisation. Organisations want a software that aligns perfectly with internal workflows and processes. What many fail to realise is that most modern SaaS platforms offer extensive customisation options that can be tailored to your organisations exact requirements.

Beyond out-of-the-box features, some SaaS providers like Rosterfy offer custom coding and feature building as an adjunct to the core platform. This allows you to design functions that exactly replicate your internal processes—without the cost of running a dev team. This approach gives you the flexibility of a custom-built solution with the reliability and cost-effectiveness of a SaaS platform.



No headaches with security & compliance.

Maintaining enterprise-grade security and privacy compliance for a custom-built VMS is a major commitment. Infrastructure capacity management, testing and monitoring, cybersecurity, ISO 20071 accreditation, SOC 2 compliance, and access management—all these tasks need to be performed internally when you take the 'build your own' route.

Because SaaS providers support many clients, they're well-versed in delivering world-class security and technical support. They're also able to amortise the costs of security and compliance across many clients, achieving economies of scale that an individual organisation cannot achieve.

The Rosterfy team has worked hard to bring a new level of security compliance to the VMS market, with multiple safeguards in place to protect customers. These include infrastructure, product, and administrative security protocols, along with data protection and privacy procedures built into the VMS.



One major security failure or data leak can cause catastrophic financial and reputational damage. You'll need to assess if that is a risk you're comfortable taking on.



Data Security & Compliance

Rosterfy employs cutting-edge data practices and state-of-the-art cloud-based security measures to safeguard your valuable data, instill confidence, and adhere to all necessary compliance and regulatory standards.

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How much does custom software cost and is it **valuable**?



Like with anything, you get what you pay for. Enterprise volunteer management software often comes with a higher price tag but the question you need to ask yourself is, is it valuable? Before investing in a VMS you need to ask yourself:

- Does it allow for customisation or is it an out of the box solution?
- Is there the ability to integrate with my existing tech stack?
- Does it fulfill my volunteer management requirements? What's included? What's missing?
- Does it allow for scalability? You don't want to invest time and money getting something set up that you will outgrow in a few years.

If you find a VMS that ticks all these boxes, chances are the higher price tag will still be considerably lower than if you decide to build your own software from scratch as you'll need to invest

So should you build or buy?

Ultimately, you'll need to make a call on what's right for your particular organisation. There is no doubt that the inherent risk in building is certainly much higher than buying, particularly for organisations that do not already have a high degree of software development expertise.

The key risks you'll need to consider when building:

- **Technology choice:** Choosing the wrong development frameworks can introduce limitations for the future evolution of the product.
- **Executional issues:** Scope creep and build problems have the potential to introduce financial and organisational headaches downstream.
- **Delayed delivery:** Timeline blowouts can leave your organisation without the product it really needs today.
- **Lifecycle costs:** Long-term maintenance costs have the potential to be much higher than SaaS subscriptions.

Summary

Pros v Cons – Build v Buy Software



Pros

Custom to your needs

When you build the software, you can tailor it to the specific needs and processes of your business.

Ultimate control

You decide the timing of your project, what to include, who's involved, and how much to spend.

Potential cost savings

Self-implementation can be more cost effective as long as you stick to your budget and don't exceed allotted timeframes that require additional work hours.

Self-sufficiency

No need to rely on an outside company to make updates, fix bugs, or handle complex issues. You can handle it all internally at your own speed.



Cons

Requires significant manpower and time

Software development is not a one-person job. It requires locating the right talent to lead the project, code, QA, implement, integrate, and train. Does it make sense to take your team away from your product or program to create something new?

Knowledge gaps

By building your own software you're essentially starting from scratch. VMS solutions like Rosterfy have been developed with years of industry experience driving innovation. Will your team be able to build something in a short period of time that measures up?

The need for upkeep

Creating your own software extends beyond the initial build because you must allot resources for deployment, ongoing upkeep, and regular updates.

The final outcome. Will it actually deliver?

Arguably the biggest risk of building your own software is whether or not it will actually provide you with the resources you need to better manage and engage your volunteers.

Building your own software means you will be trialing it for the first time and any development required to fix mistakes will take your team time and effort.

The **choice** is yours

There is little doubt that a SaaS-based VMS will provide high flexibility and lower costs over the life of the platform – with much less organisational risk.

What's more, faster implementation, built-in security, and true scalability make it a far more efficient solution than building from scratch. And by freeing up internal resources, you'll be able to do what you do best—focus on your cause.



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If your organisation has highly unusual requirements that existing platforms cannot accommodate, then building your own system might be worth considering. Factors such as your organisation's size and your area of focus will play an important role in the final decision. Just make sure you carefully weigh up the realities of potential cost overruns, maintenance burdens, security challenges, and possible service disruption in your final decision.

Remember to always keep the end goal in sight. The right VMS for your organisation is the one that makes your community feel valued, supports the most effective use of their time, and achieves a high return on investment.

Want to learn more?

Book in some time to speak to one of Rosterfy's volunteer management specialists to better understand how Rosterfy's VMS could benefit your organisation.

[BOOK A DEMO](#)

About Rosterfy



Rosterfy is the leading volunteer management software provider, dedicated to helping organisations streamline their volunteer programs and maximise engagement.

Trusted by nonprofits, hospitals, healthcare charities, sports organisations, and major events worldwide, Rosterfy offers powerful solutions for managing volunteers efficiently.

Get in touch

Whether you are drafting an RFP or have just completed one, we'd love to hear from you.

[Book some time in to speak to our team to learn more about Rosterfy in detail.](#)

Having already powered over 100 million volunteer hours worldwide and operating in 35 countries, Rosterfy is redefining how organisations create engaging experiences for volunteers, ensure compliance and provide insights into their program.

Utilised by some of the world's leading volunteer programs including British Heart Foundation, The Super Bowl, City of London, SXSW and many more, Rosterfy on average saves customers 50% of their time by replacing manual processes with automations.

From automating volunteers onboarding including reminders, updates and training prompts through to auto scheduling based on volunteers skills, preferences and availability, Rosterfy's comprehensive automation engine ensures a world class experience for your volunteers.

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