

2025

# Te Taihū Volunteer Strategy



This Strategy was developed by community organisations, local Councils, inter-agency staff and wider community.

# Our Vision

The people of Te Taihū have access to a broad range of volunteer opportunities to enrich their lives, and the lives of others, by contributing and connecting to their community.

# Our goals

1. The community has access to flexible, rewarding volunteer opportunities.
2. Organisations are supported by people who contribute their time and expertise.
3. Barriers to volunteering are identified and addressed.
4. All formal and informal volunteering in our communities is recognised, valued and celebrated.

# Acknowledgements

- Nelson City Council provided staff advice, funded information gathering in Nelson and Tasman, and encouraged the development of the strategy.
- Volunteer Nelson collected Nelson–Tasman feedback and developed the strategy.
- The Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) funded the development of the strategy.
- Volunteer Marlborough collected Marlborough feedback.
- Marlborough District Council provided staff advice, designed and published the strategy.
- Tasman District Council provided staff advice.
- Volunteers and volunteer organisations in Te Taihū provided survey responses.
- A working group oversaw all aspects of this strategy. Thanks to Nelson City Council, DIA, Volunteer Nelson, Volunteer Marlborough, Tasman District Council, Marlborough District Council, Natureland, the Hospice, Brook Waimarama Sanctuary and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

# Introduction

Volunteering includes everything from informal acts of kindness for people (beyond immediate family and friends) such as helping a neighbour's child with their reading or preparing meals at a marae during a tangi through to more formal, organised volunteering roles such as taking part in planting days, serving in a charity shop, being a board member for a school or an environmental organisation, being a Justice of the Peace, helping new migrants learn English or providing phone counselling.

Volunteering is an important pathway to an inclusive society, because it provides opportunities to meet and work with new people, with the potential to develop lifelong skills and form long-term friendships. It can also reduce loneliness and support good mental and physical health. This means it's good for the individuals taking part while also help the organisations, causes and society as a whole.

All types of volunteering are valuable, and we know the informal acts of kindness described above will carry on without the need for a strategy.

However, the landscape of formal volunteering is changing. Declining numbers of volunteers is a significant issue for many community organisations. This trend is not limited to Te Taihū. Volunteering NZ has reported a similar trend throughout Aotearoa, and it is also occurring in many other countries including Australia.

The purpose of this strategy is to increase our understanding of how people want to volunteer, so that organisations can create the types of roles that will be attractive to future volunteers.



## Ageing population

Our survey results show that most people who volunteer with community organisations are retired. Te Taihū has a higher proportion of older people in our communities than the national average, and the proportion of people aged 65 and older is forecast to steadily increase. That means there is a higher proportion of people in our community who potentially have some time available to contribute to their community through volunteering. However, there is also a strong trend for people to remain in some kind of paid work until later in life, either from choice or necessity, so we can't make assumptions that everyone over 65 has spare time for volunteering.

## Barriers to volunteering

Some groups of people have huge potential to benefit from volunteering – for new migrants to feel more connected to the community, and for people without employment to gain a sense of achievement and purpose. However, limited English language, disabilities and poor mental health can make it difficult to get involved, particularly when volunteer-involving organisations have limited time and resources to find ways around these barriers.

## Flexible and casual volunteering options

Our survey results also show us that many potential volunteers want more flexibility to choose how and when they contribute, to fit around their other commitments.

There has been an increase in the number of volunteers performing 'casual volunteering' for a few hours a month. Volunteering NZ recently reported that:

- 23.1% of volunteers perform 2–5 hours of volunteer work per month
- 7.2% perform 20 hours or more.

Creating a better match between how people want to contribute and the opportunities available in organisations will benefit everyone. That's why this strategy focuses on how to align the types of volunteering opportunities available with what people want.

We can also make it easier for young people to access volunteer opportunities that are safe, relevant and meaningful to them.

Specific barriers to volunteering are discussed in the 'Research' section and reflected in Goal 3 of this strategy.

## Types of volunteering

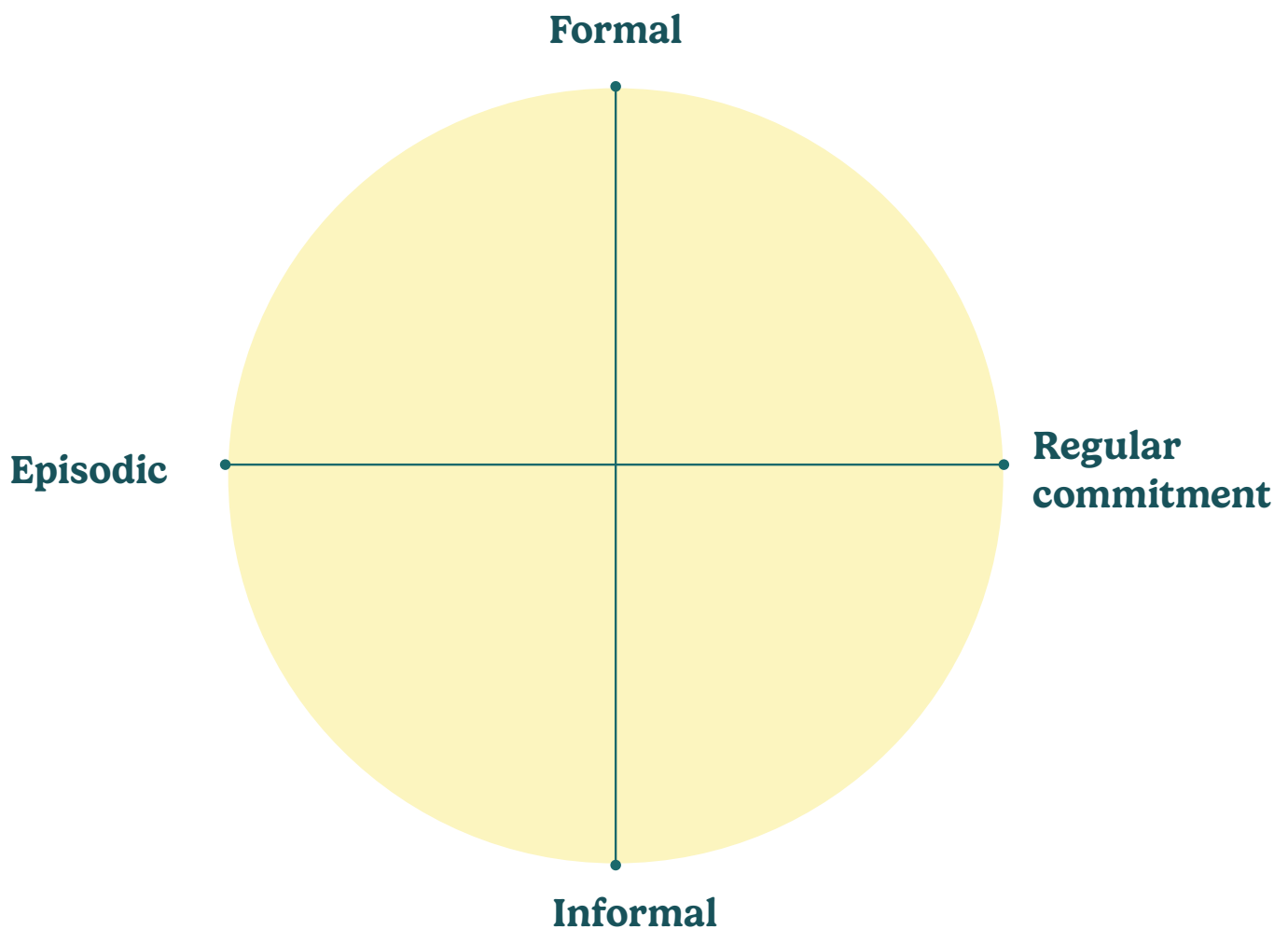
Formal volunteering is the term used for voluntary work with an organisation such as a sports club, charity or a community group.

A subset of formal volunteering is corporate volunteering, when an organisation 'lends' its employees to a volunteer organisation. While this assistance is welcome, it can be difficult for organisations to accommodate one-off volunteering requests, particularly for large groups of employees, unless an event is planned in advance .

Many people visit people in aged care facilities, mind someone else's children or help out in another way without signing up to an organisation. This is called direct, or spontaneous, volunteering.

This is particularly the case in Māori and Pacific cultures, where this is 'just what we do' and it's not even called volunteering. Young people also volunteer a lot, often under the radar through church, schools and youth organisations such as Scouts.

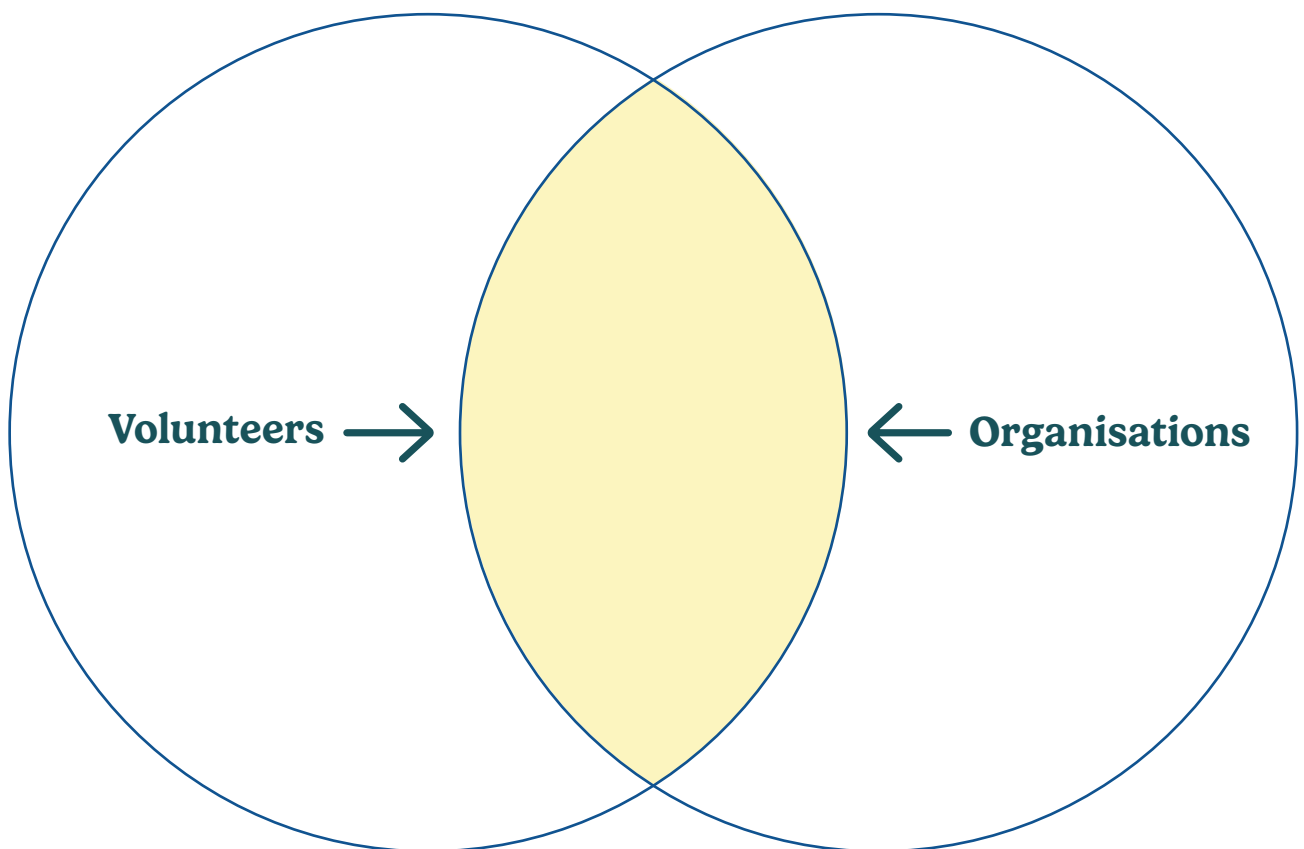
It all counts, and it all matters. And even though the informal, direct volunteering will continue without the need for interventions in a strategy, we can still recognise and celebrate it.



## The scope of this strategy

This strategy identifies:

- what people want from formal volunteering experiences
- how to enhance formal volunteering opportunities in Te Taihū
- how to remove barriers to formal volunteering
- what more we can do to appreciate and promote all forms of formal and informal volunteering.



# What we know – and what you told us.

## 1. About the volunteers

### Who does formal volunteering?

The Nelson Tasman survey of organisations found that:

- 32% of organisations have a diverse pool of volunteers, often with programmes which are attractive to younger people and diverse individuals, related to the arts, environment, sports and animals.
- 68% of organisations report that their volunteers are mainly retired Pākehā

[Note: We don't currently have equivalent demographic information like this for Marlborough – as part of the working group review process ask Volunteer Marlborough if they have anything to add in here.]

### What volunteers want

The biggest barrier to volunteering is having the time to take part, so volunteering options need to be flexible to fit around people's other commitments.

People want:

- the freedom to volunteer for one project or event, or something short term, or every now and again, rather than making a regular, long-term commitment
- the ability to review a range of opportunities on an online platform, to find the ones that align with their values, interests and experience
- their contribution to be meaningful
- an easy sign-up process.

There are many reasons why people volunteer in Te Taihū, including:

- making a positive impact
- contributing to their community
- making new friends
- having a sense of purpose and wellbeing.

The State of Volunteering 2024 report notes there is a greater focus on social and health-related issues for volunteering; and for some people it is important for volunteering activity to be values-aligned and impact-driven.

There is also an increasing expectation that volunteering should be 'fun' and 'not like work'.

## Older volunteers

Numerous academic studies have found there are mental health benefits from volunteering for people who are 40 or older, and this becomes even stronger during old age, as stated in a UK report on the link between mental health and volunteering. Other benefits include physical health, a sense of purpose and increased social networks.

A 'Business of Ageing' report by New Zealand's Office for Seniors notes that working beyond the traditional retirement age can have many positive effects. "There are many apparent benefits from participation in both paid and voluntary work after the age of 65." Another factor to consider when designing volunteer roles for older people is that many New Zealanders are heading towards older age living on their own.

A survey of older people's attitudes to work found that flexible hours of work, the ability to take time off, and work with less responsibility or physical demands were important factors for older people.

Successful marketing of volunteer opportunities to older people will focus on how these roles can provide older people with what they really want, to help them enjoy their retirement years.

The 2023 update on the business of ageing notes: "With the increase in numbers of older people working, there are likely to be more older people in employment who are also doing unpaid work" and "we are still expecting more males than females to make up our older workforce".

This information suggests the number of hours people have available for unpaid work will be limited by their other work commitments – and that more women than men are likely to be doing volunteer work.

## Younger volunteers

There are slightly different reasons to encourage young people to try volunteering:

- People who have a positive experience at a young age they are likely to return to volunteering later.
- It builds confidence, and communication, social and leadership skills. It also looks good on a CV and has potential to lead to employment.
- It provides a sense of connection.
- It provides a way to take positive action in response to issues such as climate change.

Younger people want:

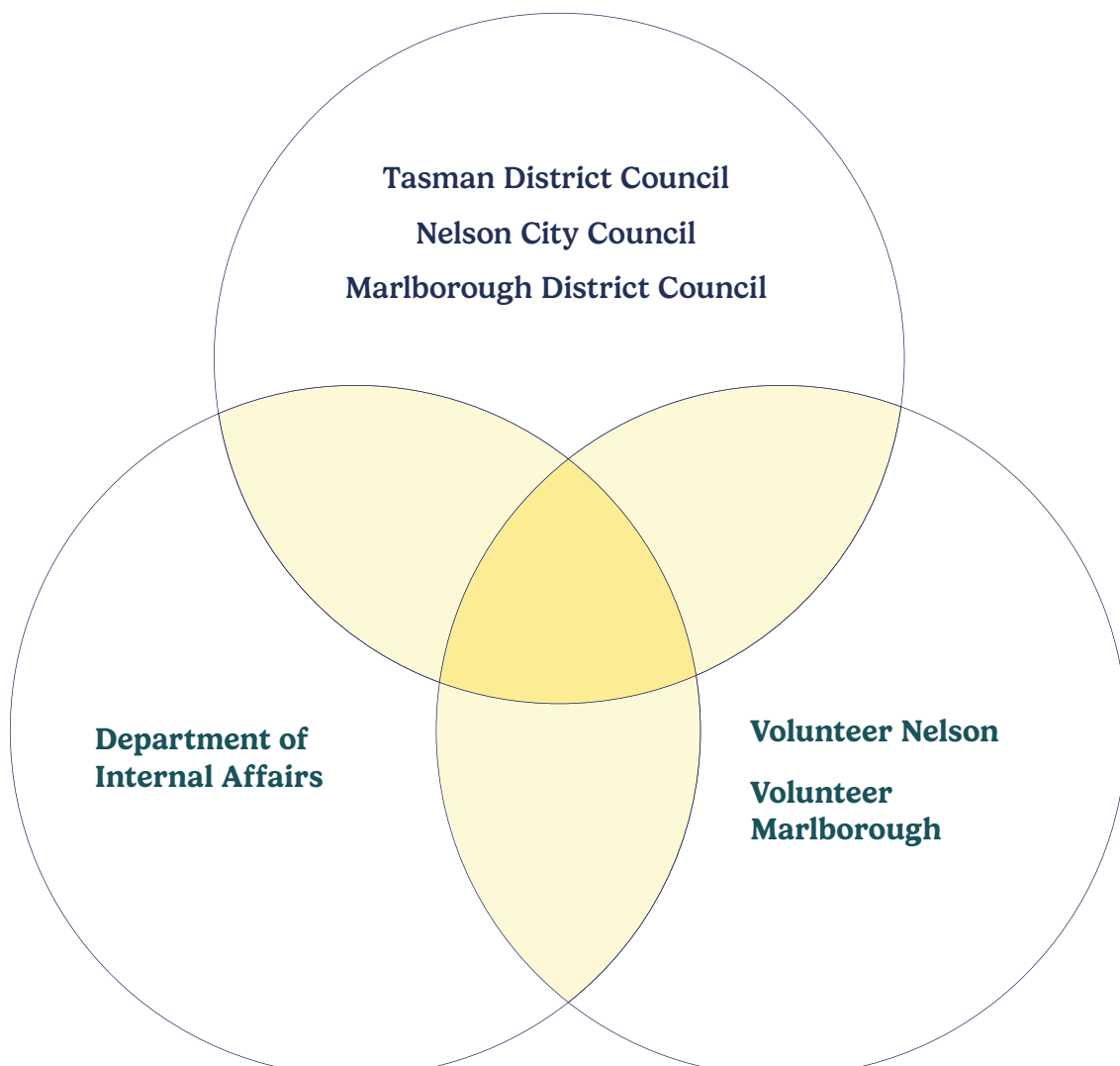
- to be able to find opportunities online (social media post or internet search)
- to volunteer with family or friends
- to take part in less formal volunteering, such as protesting or tree planting.



## What volunteers do

The Department of Internal Affairs report 'Strengthening our Approach to Volunteering, June 2022' states that volunteers in New Zealand participate in:

- sports and recreation (sports clubs and coaching) – 3.2 million hours volunteered
- religious and spiritual (churches and religious associations) – 2.5 million hours
- social services (civil defence, emergency support and youth groups) – 1.8 million hours
- arts and culture (art galleries and museums) – 1.5 million hours
- health (hospitals, nursing homes and hospices) – 1.3 million hours
- environment, conservation and animal protection (SPCA, tree planting and Greenpeace) – 0.7 million hours
- law, advocacy and politics (victim support, legal services and political parties) – 0.7 million hours
- community development and housing (marae work, community centres and community support groups) – 0.6 million hours
- business, professional associations and unions – 0.3 million hours
- overseas volunteer work (volunteering abroad and international emergency) – 0.1 million hours.



## 2. What organisations need

### About organisations

Unless otherwise indicated, all references to ‘organisations’ within this strategy mean organisations which involve volunteers in the delivery of their programmes, including sports, religious, social service, arts and culture, health, environmental and other community organisations.

### Many of these organisations need more volunteers, now and in future

In Marlborough’s survey of organisations:

- more than 70% were actively seeking new volunteers; and
- one third found it easy to attract volunteers, and two-thirds did not.

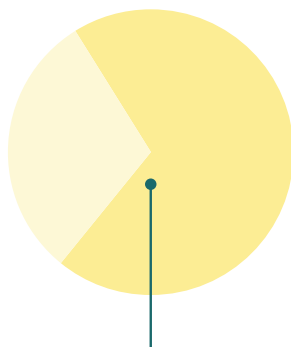
In Nelson-Tasman’s survey of organisations:

- 80% need more volunteers (and 20% have enough).

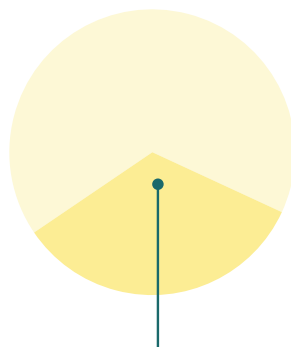
In particular, small and medium sized volunteer organisations struggle to recruit volunteers due to limited capacity, such as access to social media skills to raise awareness about volunteer opportunities, staff time to support volunteers, and competing demands on volunteers’ time.

The recent Te Taihū Strengthening the Sector Survey Report (2023) received feedback from 164 organisations. The five top issues or challenges for these organisations are listed below:

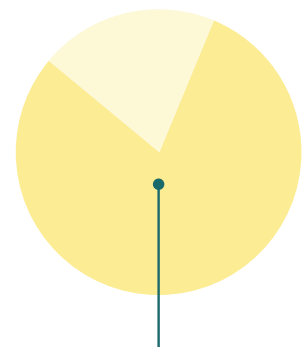
- financial sustainability (64%)
- finding and keeping volunteers (48%)
- succession planning (44%)
- responding to higher, complex client needs (32%)
- finding and keeping board members (32%).



**70% of organizations are actively seeking new volunteers**



**1/3 of organisations find it easy to attract volunteers**



**80% of organizations need more volunteers**

## Our ageing population

The increasing need for volunteers reflects that the current group of people who volunteer are getting older. The **State of Volunteering in Aotearoa New Zealand 2022** report noted that ageing volunteers was the single biggest challenge for 47.5% of organisations.

Nelson’s City for All Ages Strategy notes: “Many older adults support their community by giving their time and skills for free. If the value of the contribution older volunteers make is converted into a dollar figure, by mid-century, it is predicted to add \$35 billion of value to the country, more than double their contribution through paid work. However, the reliance on ageing volunteers can also be a risk and a 2020 survey showed the voluntary sector saw the ageing of its volunteer workforce as a significant concern.”

The City for All Ages Strategy includes an action to work with Volunteer Nelson to encourage more volunteers amongst older adults.

The increasing trend for people to keep working beyond 65 years old potentially reduces the number of people moving into retirement and seeking volunteer work as part of their new lifestyle. On the other hand, Nelson has one of the lowest 65+ participation rates (in the paid workforce) in New Zealand.

The Business of Ageing report notes that by 2031, the number of New Zealanders aged 65 and over is expected to exceed one million. And by 2051 the value of unpaid and voluntary work by older people is expected to be more than \$22 billion.

## Gaining new volunteers

The following data is from an Australian survey and is likely to be similar in New Zealand:

- The most widely used methods for recruiting volunteers is through word of mouth (89%) and personal approaches (69%).
- Organisations also promoted roles on their own websites (75%) but this is a less effective way to attract volunteers.



## Governance boards

It is particularly difficult to recruit volunteers for governance boards. Many community organisations need to have a governance board, and in most cases these board member roles are performed by volunteers – and there is a need for particular skills for these roles. Many boards would appreciate the input of young people with new ideas and more familiarity with social media and new technology.

The Nelson Tasman survey of volunteers highlighted a need for training for governance positions, particularly due to the liability risks for people in these roles. Some boards do have insurance, such as liability coverage, to mitigate risk, and Community Governance Aotearoa is currently looking into this issue.

A report called ‘Strengthening Community Governance in Nelson and Tasman’ was prepared to gather information on how to support not-for-profit leadership and governance in Nelson. This led to the Department of Internal Affairs providing funding for governance training and Nelson City Council funding a Youth into Governance programme, which gives young people experience on a board, assisted by mentor and learning forums.

## 3. Specific barriers to volunteering

Some of the groups of people with the most to benefit from volunteering include:

- migrants, for whom English is not their first language
- people suffering from social anxiety or other mental health issues.
- people with dyslexia or a lack of computer skills
- people with physical or intellectual disabilities (including dementia).

However, time-poor volunteer managers often lack the time and resources to provide extra support for volunteers experiencing these barriers. Marlborough’s survey of organisations identified that:

- 31.8% of organisations have a dedicated, well-resourced volunteer manager.
- 68.2% of organisations do not have a dedicated volunteer manager.  
(The role is covered as part of the manager or administrator’s job or provided by a volunteer overseen by paid staff or a board.)

In addition “many organisations are aware of the dangers of migrant exploitation when involving recent migrants in volunteering”.

## Internet access

Another potential barrier for older adults is internet access, particularly as we increasingly move to online marketing of volunteer roles, and online training and coordination of volunteers.

The City for All Ages Strategy notes: “Older adults are a group prone to low internet access as internet use diminishes with age, quite sharply above 75. In Whakatū Nelson”.<sup>19</sup>

89% of 65 to 69 year olds have internet access, but this drops to 52% for the over 85 group, the lowest of all age groups. The Government’s Better Later Life Action Plan has identified digital inclusion as one of its three priorities for action as it is important that those without internet access are not left behind.”

## Young people

There are not enough opportunities for young people due to:

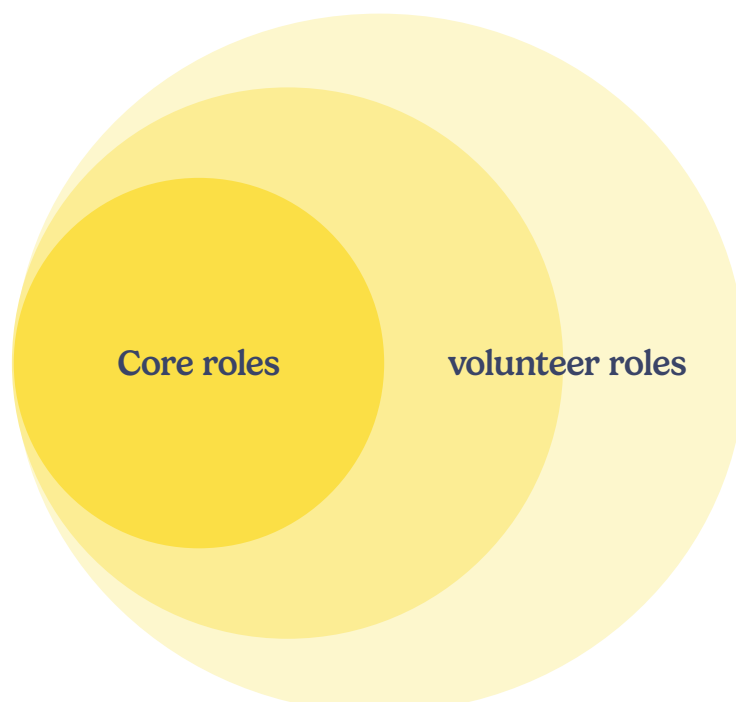
- health and safety considerations (e.g. the need for police vetting/criminal record checking of people who will be responsible for young volunteers)
- lack of awareness of the opportunities, and some volunteer opportunities not being particularly youth-friendly.

In addition, young people often prefer informal volunteer actions.

## The need to undertake more paid work

The State of Volunteering 2024 report states: “There is an interesting paradox, where tougher social conditions increase the demands for volunteers and provide more opportunities for volunteering, while volunteer availability is lower as lots of volunteers themselves need to undertake more paid work to make ends meet.

For example, the current cost of living conditions mean that more people need food banks and other services provided by volunteers while fewer people have the resources to donate time or money to food banks. Crises and challenges of different scales therefore challenge the resilience and strength of the community and voluntary sector at a time when their services are most in demand.”



## 4. Valuing volunteers and their impacts

### Formal volunteering

Volunteer organisations vary in how they recognise and value volunteers:

- Many volunteers prefer small gestures of thanks
- Some organisations regularly nominate volunteers for awards and honours.
- Some organisations reimburse volunteers for their out-of-pocket expenses.

The Department of Internal Affairs report 'Strengthening our Approach to Volunteering, June 2022' states that 32% of organisations reimbursed volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses.

The Volunteering NZ report 'State of Volunteering 2022' stated that: 25.3% of volunteering organisations do not reimburse their volunteers for any expenses; 31.4% reimburse their volunteers for some expenses; and 43.3% reimburse volunteers for all their volunteering-related expenses.

We don't yet know if lack of reimbursement is a significant barrier to volunteering in Te Taihū.

### Semi-formal and informal volunteering

Respondents to the Nelson-Tasman survey of organisations noted that the value and contribution of faith-based organisations is also often overlooked.

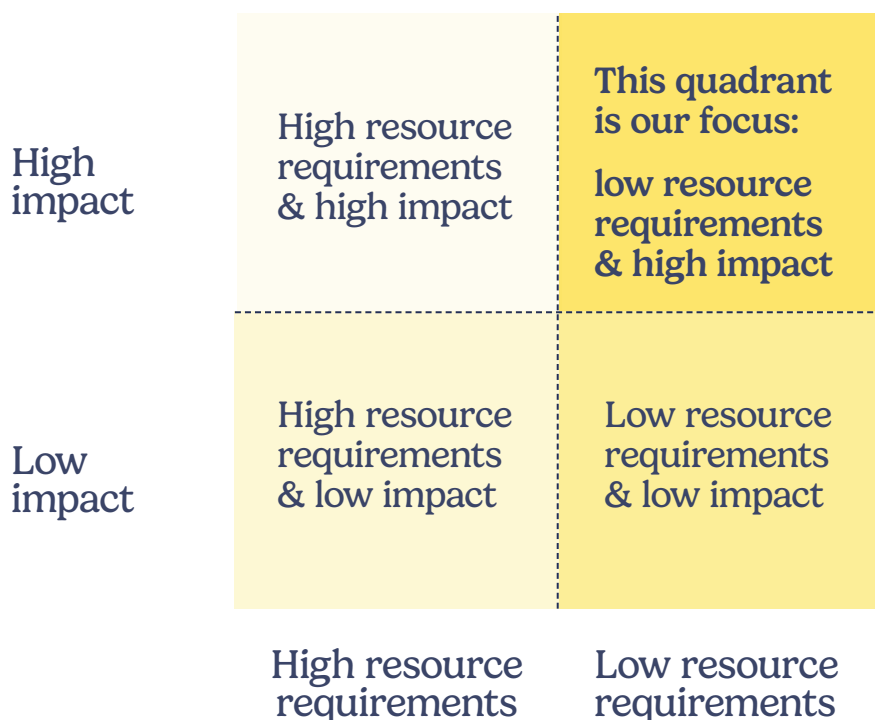
Church members, iwi, marae-based and Pacific people all contribute their time to help others, and these types of volunteering often go under the radar – with these contributions not even recorded in Census statistics because they don't fit within official definitions of volunteering.

This includes:

- mahi aroha – providing essential services or other benefits to Māori that would not otherwise have been available and that contribute to improving the wellbeing of Māori as a people, as well as individuals; and
- Pacific peoples' engagement in unpaid activities such as looking after the elderly, providing social support, providing accommodation and transportation, and translating or interpreting Pacific languages.

Similarly, sporting organisations and schools have a core group of people (the parents of the children) who volunteer as coaches and supporters of sporting and other school-related events.

### Impact Assessment Quadrant



# Our Vision

The people of Te Taihū have access to a broad range of volunteer opportunities to enrich their lives, and the lives of others, by contributing and connecting to their community.

## Goals

### 1 The community has access to flexible, rewarding volunteer opportunities.

Volunteering opportunities reflect the changing needs, interests and availability of volunteers.

### 2 Organisations are supported by people who volunteer their time and expertise.

Volunteer contributions boost the positive outcomes able to be delivered by organisations. Redesigning roles to create a better match between what volunteers want and the opportunities available in organisations will help to meet the needs of both volunteers and organisations.

### 3 Barriers to volunteering are identified and addressed.

Volunteering provides opportunities for social connections, enhanced mental health and a sense of purpose. Removing barriers to participation has significant potential to enhance the wellbeing of people who are not currently able to take part in volunteer activities. This is particularly important for migrants, youth, older people and people with mental health challenges.

### 4 All formal and informal volunteering in our communities is recognised, valued and celebrated.

We can increase the community's awareness and appreciation of the critical role volunteers play in bringing together and nurturing flourishing and resilient communities.



## Implementation of this strategy

An action plan is being developed to implement this strategy. If you are interested in being involved in this process or have practical ideas for its contents Please contact Volunteer Nelson or Volunteer Marlborough for details.

## Reference and source materials

- State of Volunteering in Aotearoa New Zealand Report, 2024
- Volunteer Nelson, 2024
- Nelson Tasman Report on Volunteers and Organisations, 2024 (not publicly available)
- Association of volunteering with mental well-being: a lifecourse analysis of a national population-based longitudinal study in the UK, 2016
- The Business of Ageing, 2011
- Business of Ageing – Companion Report, 2023
- Marlborough Survey of Organisations, 2024 (not publicly available)
- Te Taihū Strengthening the Sector Survey Report 2023
- Interview – Nelson College
- State of Volunteering in Aotearoa New Zealand 2022
- City for All Ages Strategy, 2022 (Nelson)
- Marlborough Age-Friendly Strategy 2022–2027
- Tasman District Council Age-Friendly Policy, 2019
- Volunteering in Australia 2022 – The Organisation Perspective
- Mahi Aroha – Māori Perspectives on Volunteering and Cultural Obligations, Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector, 2007
- Pacific Economy Research Report on Unpaid Work and Volunteering in Aotearoa, July 2021





