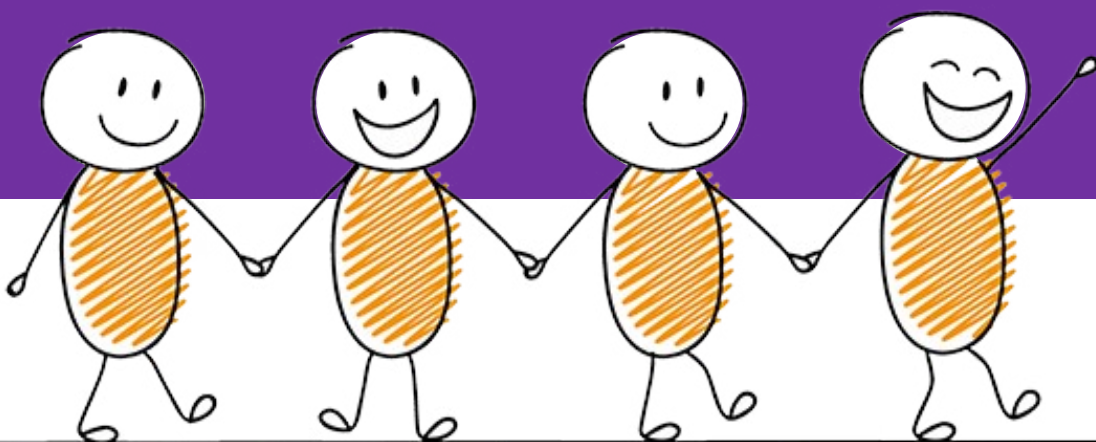


Guide to Attracting & Engaging Autistic Volunteers

STEP

3

Onboarding,
Supporting &
Retaining



These resources were developed by Empower Autism.

Empower Autism is a well-established, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to providing information, support and capacity development services to autistic people, their parents, carers and families. Empower Autism's vision is a world where autistic people fully participate, contribute and succeed to their fullest potential with confidence and self-belief.

Volunteers have been the heart of Empower Autism for the life of the organisation, which was established in 1994. The organisation currently has over 50 volunteers, who assist across a range of programs and services.

With over 30% of their staff and 47% of their volunteers identifying as autistic, and 30 years of experience supporting a team of neurodiverse volunteers, Empower Autism is well placed to develop these resources to build capacity in the sector.

These resources provide autism affirming information alongside practical and easy-to-implement tips based on extensive experience. They are designed to get you started on your journey to becoming more accessible and inclusive. We have included further links to expand your understanding to suit your organisational needs.

We encourage you to share this resource with other volunteering organisations and your broader community.

Acknowledging our support partners

This project was made possible by [Volunteering Queensland](#) with the support of the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

We would like to also acknowledge the team from **Amaze** who provided feedback and guidance on the content of these resources via a formal review process.

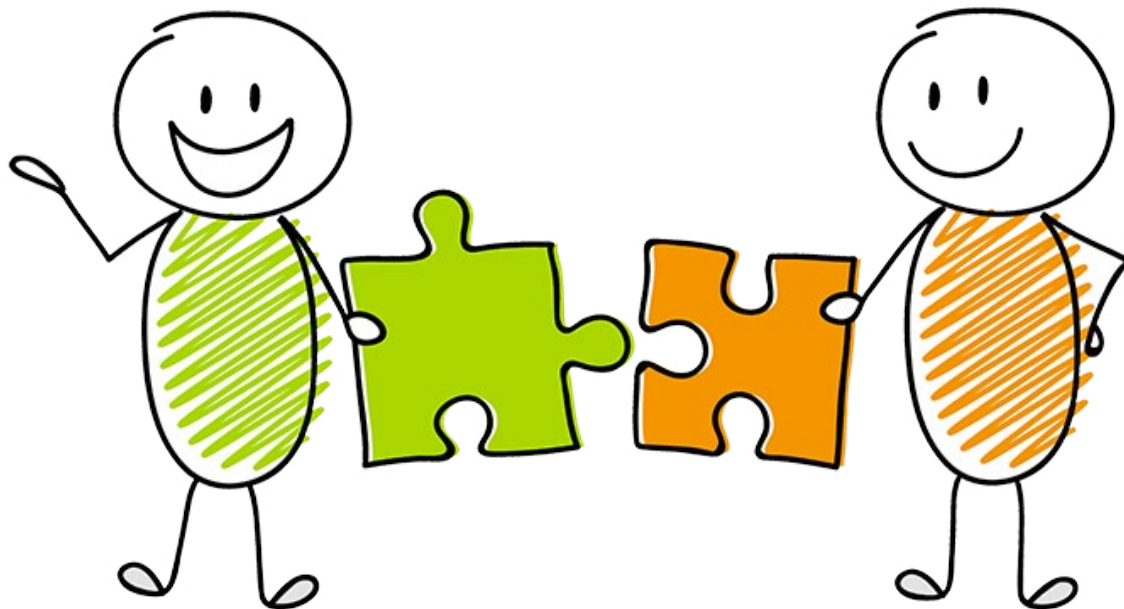
Feedback

We value feedback, as this enables us continuously to improve the supports and resources we provide to volunteer organisations. We would greatly appreciate you completing a survey on your experience using these resources. To complete, please follow this [link](#)



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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 a 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"> ✓ Mentor - 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. ✓ Buddy - Offers friendship, companionship, and support to the volunteer. Helps new volunteers feel welcomed and included in the 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Coaching – 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. ✗ 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?
Make the most out of location tours	<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"> » Be flexible – you can provide location tours in-person or online – Think about implementing pre-recorded virtual tours – Use a phone or online meeting software to conduct an online tour – Provide a map of the facilities and space in advance » Proactively highlight sensory areas that might be present and open the conversation to any preferences or sensitivities.
Provide step-by-step instructions with visual supports	<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"> » Display simple instructions with visual support around a volunteering space near where a task will be completed – Think about any tasks you explain to a new volunteer (sometimes more than once!) – Examples may be operating lighting, starting a coffee machine or anything related to the role – Use colour coding and symbols where possible to make things even clearer » Develop a simple and easy to read guide or manual that new volunteers can use that covers each aspect of a volunteering role.

TIP	WHAT AND WHY?	HOW CAN I SUPPORT AUTISTIC VOLUNTEERS?
Use scripts to model social interactions	<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">» Identify common social interactions in a volunteering role» Develop a customised script for how to respond to each situation and encourage new volunteers to use this as a reference» Offer to role-play these scripts with a new volunteer to build confidence

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.

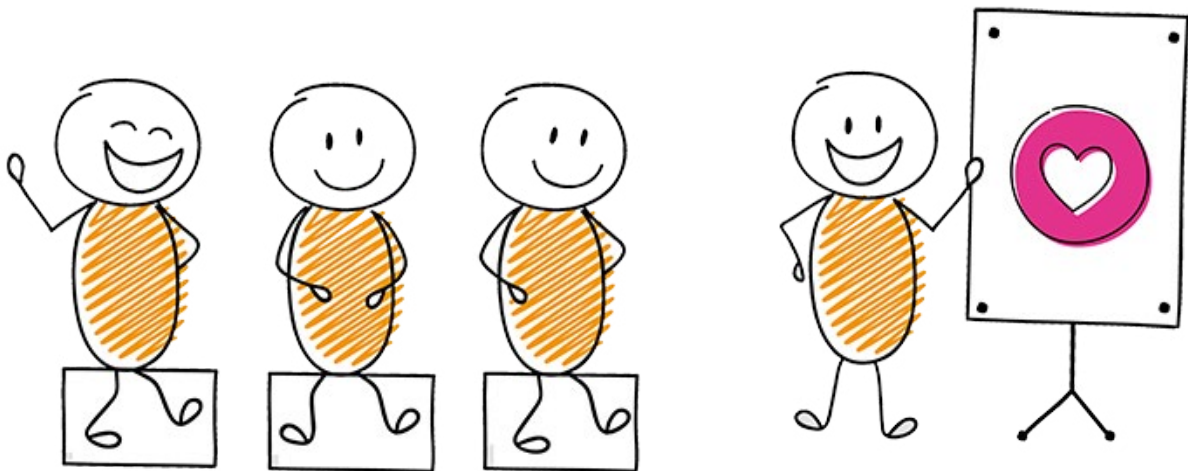
Supporting Unique Preferences

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

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
Sensory Over-Responsivity	A profound and heightened 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.
Sensory Under-Responsivity	There may be situations where an autistic volunteer may be slower or less reactive when responding to sensory input, such as a dulled response to pain or awareness of surroundings.
Sensory Seeking	Autistic individuals may prefer 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
<p>Visual Sensitivity</p>	<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"> • Bright or flickering lights • Excessive visual clutter • Contrasting patterns and colours, such as flooring patterns. • People traffic can be receptions, hallways or kitchens that have a high level of movement 	<p>Lighting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 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. » Consider the use of tinted glasses or hats indoors where necessary to manage light sensitivity in particularly bright environments. » Explore the possibility of controllable lighting in the volunteering space if appropriate. <p>High traffic areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Implement clear directional signage in high traffic areas, these can be as simple as an arrow to the location (e.g. Toilets ↑) » Consider the physical layout of a volunteering space, and how you can reduce people traffic through the placement of furniture and other objects. » Actively place autistic volunteers away (or towards) high traffic areas such as receptions and meeting rooms, depending on their sensitivities.

SENSORY SENSITIVITY	WHAT IS IT?	EXAMPLE OF SENSORY SUPPORTS
Smell & Odour Sensitivity	<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>Some examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfumes, air freshener or other role-specific odours (e.g., chemical smells). • Certain food odours • Multiple odours at the same time, such as in kitchen/meal break areas 	<p>Strong odours & smells</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Consider using handheld air freshener instead of an automatic system if a particular scent is off-putting, increasing control and predictability. » 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. <p>Role-related odours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increase airflow to particularly smelly volunteering environments, using fans, windows and air-conditioning. » 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.

SENSORY SENSITIVITY	WHAT IS IT?	EXAMPLE OF SENSORY SUPPORTS
Tactile Sensitivity	<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"> • Certain fabrics, and clothing labels can be extremely uncomfortable. • The temperature of a given environment and the physical proximity of others. • Touch, such as shaking hands 	<p>Role uniform fabrics & labels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Give autistic volunteers time to become accustomed and practice wearing uniforms or equipment required for the role (e.g., safety goggles) » Allow volunteers to wear clothing items under the uniform to act as a barrier if it is uncomfortable. » Provide alternative clothing options. » Consider a long-term goal of using fabrics that are soft, non-irritating and hypoallergenic within your volunteering organisation. <p>Product textures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Offer the use of gloves for certain tasks and products » If appropriate, match sensory-seeking sensations with aligning products and environments <p>Physical proximity and temperature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Show autistic volunteers where there are quiet or private spaces. This can assist autistic people to take breaks when required. » 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. » Consider the rostering of autistic volunteers. There may be times of the day or week that are better, such as early morning when cooler or on a day with less people.

SENSORY SENSITIVITY	WHAT IS IT?	EXAMPLE OF SENSORY SUPPORTS
Auditory Sensitivity	<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"> • Difficulty working in environments with constant background noise. • Unpredictable noises (e.g., fire alarms or phones ringing) 	Noisy Environments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Consider placing noisy equipment, machinery or other tools in a specific area that can minimize noise pollution. » Prepare autistic volunteers for unexpected sounds and alarms (e.g., fire alarm testing) in advance through notification and planning to make them more predictable. » Encourage and promote the use of headphones or ear plugs in appropriate roles to suppress background noise and reduce sensory input.

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.

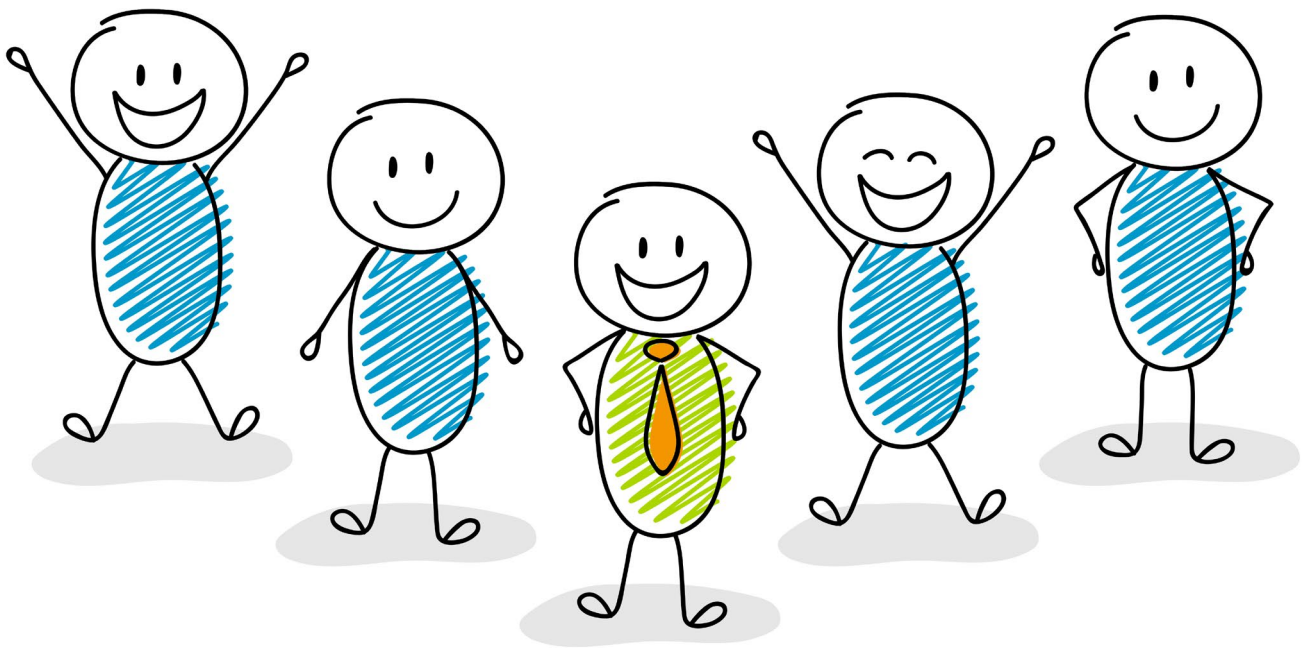
PROCESS	WHAT YOU CAN DO
Task Organisation & Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Provide clear and structured instructions for tasks, breaking them down into smaller steps for clarity » Utilise visual aids such as checklists and flowcharts to help with organisation » Allow for flexibility in 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.
Time Management & Prioritisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Support the use of visual and digital calendars to help with rostering » Use reminders and prompts for upcoming deadlines or time-sensitive tasks » Encourage and embrace the use of a variety and wide range of personal organisation tools, including apps and smart watches.
Focus & Attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Minimise distractions in the environment by reducing excessive noise and visual input to help autistic volunteers concentrate » Provide access to a quiet/private space so autistic volunteers can self-regulate. » Reduce multi-tasking
Decision-Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Use a flow chart to illustrate decision making processes. » Have a clear understanding on how to escalate decisions and who to » Develop a clear line of management for decision-making
Self-Regulation & Stress Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Allow for breaks and designated quiet spaces to manage stress » Encourage and normalise the use of self-regulation techniques (e.g., deep breathing, sensory tools) » 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

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 organisation's situation, we have provided some general conversation starters that can be 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.



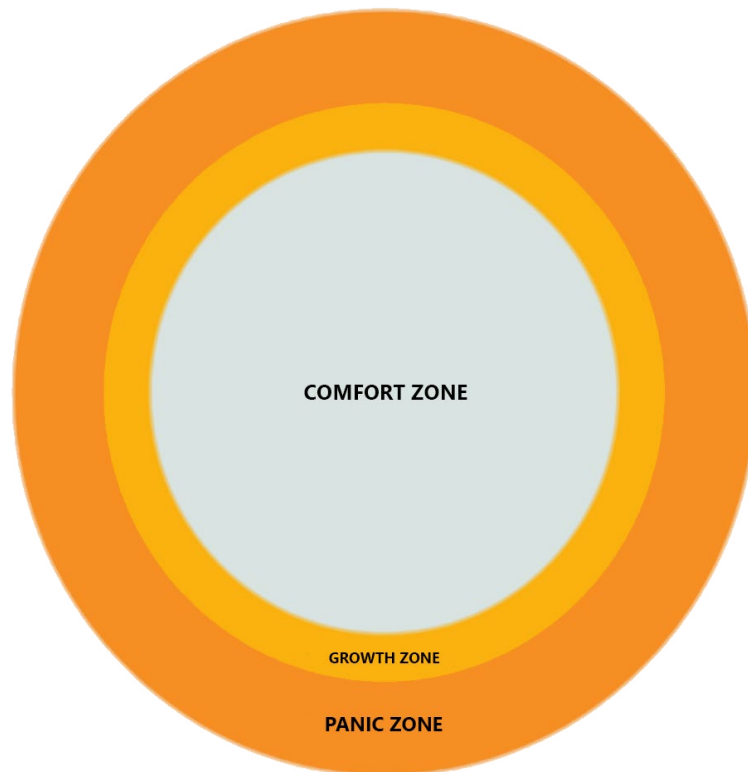
Long-Term Development

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 organisation, 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 in Book 1. 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	
What is Autism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Autism Spectrum Australia: How do we describe Autism? » Autism Tasmania: What is Autism? » Amaze: Free online course to understanding autism » Autism Awareness Australia: Understanding Autism
Talking about Autism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Autism CRC: Language Choices and the Autistic Community » Harvard Health: What is Neurodiversity?
Autistic Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Autism Tasmania: Autism Strengths » Embrace Autism: Sensory, Cognitive & Behavioural Strengths in Autism » Spectrum News: Finding Strengths in Autism
Attracting & Engaging Autistic Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Writer Girl: Accessible Language: what it is and why it matters » Academy to Innovate HR: 9 Inspiring Diversity and Inclusion Statement Examples » Volunteering Australia: Diversity and Inclusion Statement
Supportive Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Employment Autism: The Benefits of Buddying » Neurodiversity Hub: Mentoring » Autism CRC: Peer mentoring program for Autistic university students
Communication Styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » May Institute: Seven Tips for communication with Autistic Adults » Autism CRC: Language Choices and the Autistic Community » Autism Tasmania: Social Communication in Autism
Sensory Sensitivities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Autism CRC: Guidelines for Creating Autistic Inclusive Environments » Autism Tasmania: Sensory Differences » Autism Awareness Australia: Sensory Processing
Thinking Preferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Autism Tasmania: Information Processing » Autism Awareness Centre: Executive Function: what is it, and how do we support it in those with Autism?

GENERAL RESOURCES	
Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect):	https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/ 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.
Autism Awareness Australia	https://www.autismawareness.com.au/ 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.
Autism CRC	https://www.autismcrc.com.au/ 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.
Australian Network on Disability (AND)	https://www.and.org.au/ 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.
Autism Queensland:	https://autismqld.com.au/ 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.
Amaze:	https://www.amaze.org.au/ 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.

GENERAL RESOURCES	
Empower Autism	https://empowerautism.org.au/ 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.
Yellow Ladybugs	https://www.yellowladybugs.com.au/ 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.
Autism Connect	https://www.autismconnect.org.au/ 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.
Autism Advocacy Australia (A4)	https://a4.org.au/ 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
Autism	A neurodevelopmental condition that is characterised by a range of unique characteristics in communication, interests and routines, sensory processing and executive functioning.
Autism-adjacent	A term used to describe individuals who do not have an autism diagnosis but share common values and experiences with autistic individuals.
Communication Styles	Common ways in which autistic individuals may express themselves or interact with others.
Executive Functioning	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.
Identity first vs Person first language	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.
Masking	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.
Neurodevelopmental Condition	A condition that affects the development of the nervous system and brain, such as autism, ADHD, or dyslexia.
Neurodivergent	Refers to individuals who have neurological differences, including autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other conditions.
Neurodiversity	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.

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Neurotypical	Refers to individuals whose neurological development and function are within the typical range.
Reasonable Adjustments	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.
Sensory Sensitivities	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.
Social Model of Disability	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.
Strengths-Based Approach	An approach that focuses on identifying and building upon an individual's strengths and abilities, rather than focusing solely on their deficits or challenges.
Stimming	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.