

# What's in a name?

## Better ways to engage and retain volunteers for the environment

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) wanted to know how best to engage with Environmental Volunteers – what they call themselves and how they describe the activities they do – so we partnered with Quantum Market Research to investigate.

The key findings from this research can help us better attract, engage with, and retain volunteers in the environmental sector. Environmental volunteering includes caring for landscapes, waste and recycling, energy and climate change and wildlife care.

We conducted 90-minute focus group discussions with twelve individuals and received 1000 responses to a questionnaire\* to determine:

- What language best resonated with volunteers
- How volunteers describe their activities
- What language is best when advertising volunteering opportunities.

\*Focus group was divided evenly across two age groups – 18-34 year olds and 35+ year olds. 552 respondents of the questionnaire were recent/current volunteers for nature and 448 were individuals that would consider volunteering for nature.

### Key Findings

- Meaningfulness, individual impacts and fun are essential to retain volunteers
- Potential volunteers need to know that there are a range of opportunities beyond on-ground labour type activities
- Describe opportunities with terms that emphasise care for nature
- Volunteers prefer casual, personable terms, such as 'helpers' and 'extra pair of hands'
- Be specific about what the activity is
- Build the impression that volunteers are part of something bigger than themselves

“I liked the imagery of an extra pair of hands, particularly in the Australian landscape. It speaks to our 'get in and do it' attitude.”



## What's in a name? Better ways to engage and retain volunteers for the environment

### Addressing volunteers

- 'Nature' is seen as a warm and affectionate word – more personable and less loaded than 'environment'
- Volunteers implicitly see themselves as a small part of the broader organisation or cause
- Volunteers are attracted to terms that emphasise care for nature and the environment

### Describing volunteer activities

- While 'volunteering for nature' works best, other options include 'environmental volunteering' or 'volunteering for conservation'
- Provide enough detail for volunteers to gauge the integrity of the organization more broadly
- 'Citizen Science' is exciting to prospective volunteers, but be explicit in describing the activity, objectives and impacts by the program so far

### Designing calls to action

- Don't overwhelm with details – use images to break up text, use lists, and use links to more information
- Highlight meaningfulness, impact, social connection and the bigger picture of the volunteer's contribution
- Be casual, inviting and friendly. Be genuine

### Retaining volunteers

- Communicate the meaning and impact of individual contributions
- Show volunteers they are part of something bigger than themselves and provide a sense of feel-good
- Younger volunteers are more likely to remain engaged through strong social connection
- Lean in to social networking and foster community among younger volunteers

“Sustainability is the most over used and now quite meaningless word... a word I would love to see never used again. It needs to be broken up into recycling, renewable energy, waste reduction etc.”

We acknowledge Victorian Traditional Owners and their Elders past and present as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters and commit to genuinely partnering with them and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.

