

Age-Friendly Volunteer Engagement

Guidance for Organizational Leaders

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Older adults bring experience, reliability, and diverse perspectives to volunteer work. Many want to contribute, but they don't always feel welcome.

Leaders of volunteer organizations, like you, set the tone and systems that determine whether volunteer roles are truly accessible and welcoming. Prioritizing inclusion can strengthen your volunteer retention, sharing of diverse ideas, and community trust.

Key Leadership Actions

Don't...	Instead...
• Assume older adults' skills • Underestimate the ability of older volunteers to pick up new skills • Assign menial tasks to those who prefer not using digital tools • Isolate volunteers • Separate volunteers by age • Rely on one communication channel • Disregard older adults' ideas • Prescribe how everyone engages as a volunteer • Make volunteers feel insignificant	• Ask about their skills and interests • Provide training and support based on individual experience • Offer low-barrier entry points and meaningful volunteer paths that work for different skills and interests, including digital and non-digital opportunities • Know volunteers' names • Encourage intergenerational teamwork • Use multiple outreach methods (newsletters, texts, word-of-mouth) • Listen and value older adults' expertise • Design roles with flexibility and accessibility in mind • Lead a culture where volunteers of all ages feel valued

Volunteers want purposeful work that serves the organization. Ageism causes leaders to undervalue older adults' abilities, limiting older volunteers and the organization.

Respecting older adults and their skills benefits your community *and* your impact.

Ways to Lead Beyond the Basics

- Share this guide and City of Seattle's free 45-minute [anti-ageism training](#) with team members who work with volunteers, to help develop age-inclusion.
- Offer a discount through Seattle's [Age-Friendly Discount Directory](#), telling older adults and people with disabilities that they belong in your space.
- Explore Seattle's [Business Resource Guide](#) for detailed steps on making all aspects of your organization age-friendly.