

# **Community guidelines: Running a koala habitat restoration program with volunteers**

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## **Purpose of this document**

This document aims to provide your organisation with some tips on how to coordinate a koala habitat restoration project with volunteers.

Useful links are included for more information about koala habitat.

# Running a koala habitat restoration program with volunteers

## Have a realistic plan that is budgeted

Being realistic about your project and having a clear plan and budget can help ensure it is a success. An example budget for a 'Tree Parents' project can be found on the resources page of [koala.nsw.gov.au](http://koala.nsw.gov.au). Ensure your budget and workforce can cope over the long-term with your vision and project scale.

## Focus on safety

The safety of volunteers needs to be a top priority. Ensuring adequate risk management and duty of care (e.g. first-aid) is critical. Legal advice is also advisable (particularly around insurance and liability). Make sure you brief all incoming volunteers on risks to their safety and what they can do to mitigate them. Sunburn, dehydration, insects and snakes are the big ones.

## Set clear expectations

Ensuring people understand the commitment you need, and their roles and responsibilities, can make a big difference. An example of a statement of duties can be found on the resources page of [koala.nsw.gov.au](http://koala.nsw.gov.au).

## Lead by example

Never ask a volunteer to do something you will not do yourself. Do not make your helpers feel like they are only valued as labour – this can happen if you spend all your time directing people to do things you or your (often paid) colleagues don't do themselves. Volunteer commitment under these circumstances will rapidly drain away. Always try to work with your volunteers, leading by example.

## Establish a local water source

Positioning a plastic tank full of water (e.g. 3000 litres) next to your site for watering plantings helps reduce work time and efficiency and also helps to maintain enthusiasm for the project.

## Help people get their hands dirty

The doing is often the most satisfying part of volunteering, so aim to ensure that volunteers are putting their hands in the dirt and connecting with nature. Try not to get too bogged down in endless indoor instruction and theory. Aim to focus on the business end of tree planting, out in the bush where it counts.

## Make it easy for time-poor volunteers to do the work

Don't be too strict with schedules and give people the freedom to contribute when they can (e.g. by giving them access to the site at any time). Your site should also be easy to get to (i.e. not a huge drive).

## Store equipment on site

Storing essential tools and equipment on site (e.g. in a lockable sea container) makes it easier for volunteers to nurture their trees efficiently and effectively.

## Keep people engaged and enthusiastic

Some of the best ways to do this is by encouraging ownership and accountability, and by tapping into people's natural competitiveness and nurturing instincts, and publicising and rewarding the efforts of volunteers. The Tree Parents project incorporates competitions between teams that provide extra motivation. It also reminds people that their contribution is an opportunity to create something that will last for hundreds of years and make a real difference. The Tree Parents teams have an annual morning tea to celebrate their work together and present awards to the best growers.

## Communicate with volunteers

Communication is important. Being able to explain the importance of the site and the positive impact it will have for koalas can also help keep people focused, as will regular updates on progress and success. Distributing regular project updates, encouraging contributions from volunteers and a two-way communication flow is a great way to make people sense they are valued and their work is making a difference.

## Focus on the big picture

It's not always easy, so stay focused on the benefits the program will bring. Don't get disheartened if people complain or drop out (some will) and try to foster a positive environment for volunteers where they appreciate that you will be working at nature's pace and nothing happens that fast.

## Get the right people involved

Who should be involved in your program depends on the site. The landholder or manager is central, as are people with expert knowledge about the area and local koala populations (e.g. a NSW National Parks Ranger). A mix of volunteers from across the community is also recommended if possible. Engage a guest speaker or practitioner (e.g. a local bush regenerator) to come out and talk to your volunteers in the field to develop new skills and add value to the program.

### Useful links:

- [Koala habitat information](#) by region in NSW (NSW office of Environment and Heritage)
- [Identifying koala habitat](#) (EPA)
- [Koala friendly backyard tips and advice](#) (Australian Koala Foundation)
- [Review of koala tree use across New South Wales](#) (PDF 4MB) (NSW office of Environment and Heritage)