

MOTIVATING URBAN RESIDENTS TO VOLUNTEER FOR WATERWAY RESTORATION

This study aimed to answer the question ‘What motivates urban residents to volunteer with a community waterway restoration group?’.

By applying the systematic behaviour change framework – the Behaviour Change Wheel (Michie et al. 2014) – and audience segmentation techniques we identified the main factors influencing installation for **four potential audience segments** and recommend the most effective campaign designs to meaningful on-the-ground results.



BACKGROUND

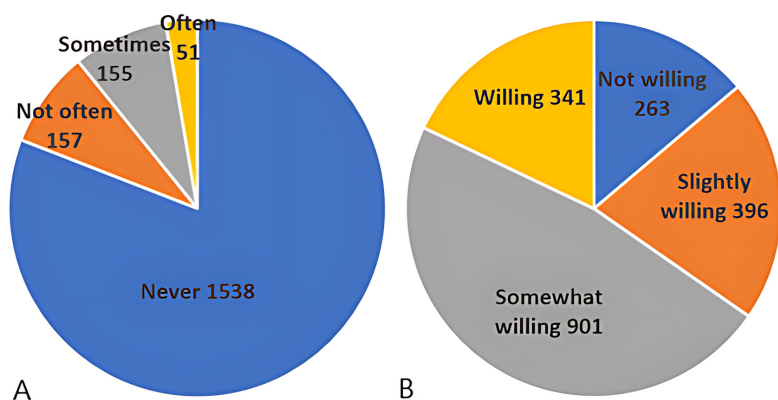
The restoration of urban freshwater systems requires concerted efforts from all sectors of society.

While government agencies, environmental organisations and research institutions play pivotal roles, the active engagement of local communities and their volunteers is equally indispensable. Volunteering with community restoration groups has been identified as an effective behaviour to improve the outcomes of urban freshwater management in Aotearoa New Zealand (McLeod et al., 2024).

However, urban populations are diverse, and very little is known about citizens’ capabilities, opportunities and motivations to volunteer. This knowledge gap poses a significant challenge for those organisations who need to develop campaigns to encourage and maintain volunteers.

RESEARCH

We surveyed 1901 urban citizens across Aotearoa New Zealand to determine the factors that encourage or impede them to volunteer with a community waterway restoration group.



AT A GLANCE

Volunteers from local communities can play an important role in restoring freshwater systems in cities.

But how can local organisations attract and retain volunteers? This research shows that a better understanding of audiences helps develop campaigns targeting specific audiences to encourage volunteers.

Figure 1.

A) Current volunteering with a community waterway restoration group

B) Future willingness to volunteer.

OUTCOMES/ IMPACTS

Most of the respondents (81%, n=1538) had never volunteered with a community waterway restoration group. Less than a fifth (18%) were willing to do so in the next 12 months (Figure 1).

We identified four distinct target audience segments:

Supportive' (n = 185, 10%)

- Most likely to have volunteered and willing to volunteer in the future. Generally older and likely to have an undergraduate qualification. Strong environmental identity and sense of community.
- This group would be the easiest to target and campaigns should aim to reinforce volunteering by ensuring positive experiences and prompt using strong environmental and/or community messages.

'Receptive but unsure' (n = 548, 29%)

- Have not volunteered but willing do so in the future. More likely to have children (of any age) in their household. Strong environmental identity but weaker sense of community.
- Campaigns should target this groups' lack of awareness of groups activities by providing information across a variety of channels advertising upcoming activities and how people can be involved, framing messages around the environmental benefits.
- Reluctance to volunteer due to not knowing anyone who is involved could be addressed by recruiting via other established groups (e.g. workplaces, sport teams) so people already know other participants.



Hesitant and Lack Opportunity' (n = 742, 39%)

- Have not volunteered but somewhat willing do so in the future.
- More likely to have school-aged children or a household member requiring special care in their household. Weaker environmental identity but a strong sense of community.
- Factors impeding volunteering included lack of awareness of the benefits of restoration activities, not residing close to waterways, activities occurring at inconvenient times, not being able to get to activities easily, and having bad volunteering experiences in the past.
- Campaigns need to promote awareness of benefits, make it easier to participate (e.g. flexibility times providing transport) and ensure positive experiences. Messages should be framed around members' community values.

'Reluctant' (n = 426, 22%)

- Have not volunteered and not willing do so in the future. Weak environmental identity and sense of community.
- Members would be the toughest to encourage to volunteer, and considering this groups smaller size, the least preferred to target.

IMPLICATIONS & POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS

Various factors impact volunteering with a community group. Employing a tailored approach, rather than a one-size-fits-all method, is crucial.

The Behaviour Change Wheel allows easy identification of precise strategies and behaviour change techniques to address these factors which is essential for creating successful campaigns and encouraging more volunteers.

References:

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Michie, S., Atkins, L., & West, R. (2014). *The behaviour change wheel. A guide to designing interventions*. Silverback Publishing, UK.

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Motivation, motivating, residents, volunteers, behaviour change, campaign, water, waterways, restoration, urban, freshwater.

