

Recognising your role in place-based work

When you volunteer in your community, you're part of the workforce that makes place-based change possible. Your work helps build the trust, leadership and relationships that keep places strong.

PLACE's 2025 Listening Tour heard that communities are carrying a heavy load of unpaid work that systems rely on but rarely recognise. This resource brings that work to light and acknowledges the people behind it.

The following sections can support your reflection and help you recognise the contribution you already make.

1 Recognise your role

People contribute to place-based work in many different ways. You might not have an official title, but what you do shapes how your community learns, leads and works together.

Read through these examples and notice which ones feel familiar. You might recognise yourself in more than one, or describe your role in your own words.

Stewards of place

Roles that sustain the cultural, environmental and relational foundations on which place-based change depends.

Custodian

Caring for Country, culture and community knowledge, and ensuring local wisdom shapes decisions and priorities.

Cultural Navigator

Bridging cultural and linguistic boundaries to help partners work respectfully and effectively in place.

Care Giver

Providing the social glue that holds communities together through practical support and relational care.

Builders of connection and collaboration

Roles that create the trust, alignment and coordination needed for community-led impact.

Connector

Linking people, organisations and efforts across systems to align around shared purpose.

Organiser

Coordinating local partnerships, communication and logistics so collaboration can take hold and grow.

Peer Supporter

Walking alongside others in the work of change, building mutual confidence and resilience.

Amplifiers of voice and story

Roles that ensure local perspectives drive action and accountability.

Advocate	Storyteller
Representing community priorities in governance, policy and program design spaces, ensuring decisions are grounded in lived experience.	Making visible what matters in place by capturing lessons, sharing successes, and communicating impact to wider audiences.

Catalysts for learning and innovation

Roles that turn local insight into new practice and capability for system change.

Mentor	Innovator
Growing the next generation of place-based leaders by sharing skills, networks and reflective practice.	Experimenting with new models, tools and partnerships that demonstrate what better looks like in context.

These roles often overlap and change over time. Together they form the trusted relationships, knowledge and leadership that keep communities strong and capable.

2 Reflect on what you've built

Take a moment to notice what's grown through your volunteering, in yourself, your relationships and your place. These prompts can help you see the capabilities, connections and strengths already here.

- What brought you to this work, and what keeps you in it?
- Where have you built trust or connection between people, organisations or groups?
- What local challenges have you helped to ease or solve, and what did you learn in the process?
- What skills, knowledge or cultural strengths have you shared or learned?
- When have you seen teamwork or leadership strengthen around you?
- What have you discovered about your community's ability to lead its own change?

3 Share your impact

Sharing what you have learned helps others learn too. You can talk about what changed, what worked well and who made a difference. This helps your group or coordinator see the strengths already in the room.

In place-based work, these stories show how local effort and relationships create change. They help communities, partners and funders see what is working and where support is needed.

If you are not sure how to start, think about the places or communities you care for. These might be the spaces where you spend time, build trust or work with others to create change. What has shifted or strengthened because of your effort, and what have you learned about how change happens here?

Stories do not have to be written or formal. You can share them through conversation, art, photos or a simple yarn. Sharing stories helps keep knowledge with community and shows what strong, connected work looks like in practice.

4 Learn more and build your practice

Volunteering is an important part of the workforce that drives place-based change. It builds skills, relationships and local leadership that keep initiatives going.

People contribute for many reasons. Some are building experience or testing new roles, others are deepening their connection to community or sharing knowledge built over years. Whatever the path, this work grows capability and strengthens the local workforce.

If you want to keep developing your practice or connect with others doing similar work, the resources below are a good starting point. Visit the PLACE website for links and more volunteering resources.

Volunteering Australia

National information, training and advocacy for volunteers and coordinators.

Volunteering Hub

A growing network that links local volunteer centres and resources across Australia, with practical tools for community-led initiatives.

GoVolunteer

Search opportunities that match your interests or availability.

SEEK Volunteer

Browse flexible, one-off or ongoing roles across Australia.

EthicalJobs

Connects people with paid and volunteer roles in purpose-driven organisations across Australia.

5 Stay connected to the bigger picture

PLACE is building the evidence, tools and partnerships that strengthen the national workforce for place-based change, including volunteering, lived-experience leadership and community contribution.

You can follow updates, learning opportunities and resources at placeaustralia.org.

