

Developing a volunteer strategy

If your organisation is thinking about involving volunteers for the first time, or developing new volunteering projects, there are a number of points to consider and stages to go through:

- Why involve volunteers?
- Who needs to be consulted?
- Understanding why people volunteer.
- Developing opportunities.
- Recruitment and selection.
- Maintenance - support, supervision and recognition.

Working through these stages will help to determine what to put into a volunteering strategy and how it will be implemented.

Why involve volunteers?

It is important to consider why you want to involve volunteers in your organisation and to think carefully about what tasks are appropriate for them to do. If there are paid staff within your organisation it is also important to involve them in this process to ensure good collaborative working is achieved. Volunteers should not replace paid work, but rather they should add value to what is already being accomplished.

Involving volunteers in your organisation brings diversity by broadening knowledge and increasing and developing skills, in addition to

extending the range of work and services.

Who needs to be consulted?

Consulting people who are in some way involved in the organisation not only ensures that everyone is on board with your plans, but it also helps to formulate ideas for the type of work volunteers will do.

Staff involvement

Knowing the benefits the organisation will get from involving volunteers is helpful in gaining staff support for volunteer programmes. Staff co-operation is essential in developing work for volunteers to do and supporting them while they are doing it. Achieving co-operation can be helped if staff members are involved in the earliest stages of volunteer development. Begin by asking a few preliminary questions to help gauge the attitude of staff:

- Have you ever supervised volunteers?
- Have you ever worked in an organisation that involved volunteers?
- Are you a volunteer?
- Are there jobs that volunteers should not do? And why?
- Should there be an induction programme for staff on working with volunteers?

- Will the organisation be able to manage volunteers?
- Are there fears for the quality of work?
- Are there worries about staff jobs?

Issues raised in the answers need to be addressed. Develop an induction programme and invite someone from an organisation with a successful volunteer project to give a talk. Ask staff who volunteer elsewhere to give a presentation on why they do what they do and what they get out of it. Find ways of recognising their volunteer work to show that the organisation values volunteering.

Demonstrate how volunteers can directly benefit the work of the organisation by asking staff to help identify work for volunteers to do:

- What parts of your job do you really like?
- What parts of your job do you dislike?
- What other activities or projects would you like to do but don't have time for?
- What would you like to see done that no-one has the skills for?

Involving staff in this way will ensure that volunteers' work is integrated with the work of the organisation, and is respected and supported by staff who will have a commitment to its success.

Client/service-user involvement

If you are a service-user/client-based organisation it is important to seek the views of the people who benefit from the service. Asking service users how the service can be improved can lead to imaginative and more interesting ideas

for volunteering. For instance a client whose first language is not English may derive additional benefit from having access to a volunteer with a specific language skill.

Consulting with funders

Discussing the development of volunteering with funders will ensure that you are not in danger of infringing funding agreements. It may generate ideas for new projects and additional funding!

Consulting with the community

Asking the views of people in the community can also lead to ideas for new volunteering opportunities and may even result in encouraging people to offer themselves as volunteers. This applies whether you serve a geographical area or a community of interest.

Motivation

You should get to know your volunteers as individuals, and be aware of what motivates them and what de-motivates them. Your volunteers could achieve satisfaction and motivation through:

- The work itself being interesting and challenging.
- Responsibility - the amount of control volunteers have in their own work and the opportunity to make related decisions.
- Achievement - personal satisfaction gained from doing a job well.
- Recognition - being recognised for the hard work and achievement.

- Growth - the opportunity to do more interesting jobs, take more responsibility and to develop their personal knowledge and skills.

Always keep a check for signs of demotivation.

You will find that once your volunteers are settled within the organisation, have gained confidence and accessed various training, their needs will probably change. It might be worth talking to them about alternative opportunities that would enable them to develop new skills. To keep volunteers well-motivated, which is essential, you could offer further training, arrange volunteers' meetings and social events, and invite them to participate in relevant meetings.

Volunteers will either be happy to remain committed to the organisation, or they may decide to move on. Whilst it is always sad to see volunteers move on, maybe you should recognise that it was your organisation that gave them the opportunities, skills, knowledge and confidence needed to achieve their goals. Celebrate this and let them know their contribution has been appreciated.

Developing opportunities

The range of work for volunteers is or should be pre-determined by the aims and objectives of the organisation. So while it is important to develop work which is attractive to volunteers, this should be in the context of the organisation's ultimate goals. Volunteers are simply one of the mechanisms that organisations use to achieve these goals. The exception to this is where the aims of the organisation are about the personal development of people.

For example in youth work or activities for people with learning difficulties, volunteering may be one of a number of different mechanisms to achieve this. Volunteer work and the way it is advertised directly determines the sort of people who will be attracted to it. So if you simply ask for volunteers you are likely to get a response from a limited group of people. When you are developing opportunities you should constantly put yourself in a volunteer's place and ask yourself:

- Why would I want to do this?
- What will I get out of it?
- What experience/skills/training will I need to do it?
- How will I achieve it?
- How will I know when I've achieved it?

If you can answer these in a satisfactory way you are ready to draw up a volunteer role description.

Role descriptions

The process of drawing up role descriptions analyses the work in a way that helps build a picture of the sort of people who might do it. It has a number of benefits as it:

- helps to define volunteers' role within the organisation
- gives status to volunteers
- equalises their position with paid staff
- clarifies their responsibilities
- clarifies the limits of their responsibilities

Role descriptions help to identify how volunteers and their work will be managed. They can be used in recruitment and should therefore include a section on what the opportunity offers in the way of rewards and benefits. A role description could include the following:

Title: What the role will be called, or what tasks are being offered.

Purpose: This is the most important part of the role description because it puts it into context and places immediate value on the work you are asking people to do. For example you may want to recruit someone to provide a dog walking service to an elderly person; but if you state that the purpose is to help a housebound person stay at home and out of residential care for as long as possible, potential volunteers can instantly appreciate how important the work is.

Suggested activities: Examples of what might be done to accomplish the purpose. The word 'suggested' indicates that volunteers have some authority to think and pursue other activities, if the organiser agrees these might be effective in achieving the overall purpose.

Measures: This links to the need for people to have targets to aim for and to know when they are achieving them. The organisation will have its own ideas of the measures it wants volunteers to achieve, but volunteers themselves should have the opportunity to suggest others. Example measures for a volunteer befriender could be:

- To provide a befriending service for up to three clients.

- To visit each client on a regular appointed visit for a minimum of one hour a week.
- To raise one new topic of conversation at each visit.
- To identify two activities/facilities which may improve the client's quality of life.
- To write up the visitor's log after each visit and pass to the organiser.
- To attend at least three pre-arranged supervision meetings with the organiser.

Time scale: Estimates number of hours and length of commitment. The profile of volunteers is changing, and frequently people are looking for short term volunteering to fill gaps in careers, or provide experience and skills to move on to something else. Offering opportunities that have no apparent conclusion can be intimidating. Even if the work is ongoing, like the befriending example above, putting a time limit of say six months or a year to a piece of work provides the impetus for working towards a goal and granting the opportunity for evaluation.

Site: Location of work.

Supervision: Relationships with staff and other volunteers, reporting requirements and supervisory relationships, as well as procedures for monitoring and dealing with problems.

Qualities: What skills, attitudes, and knowledge are desired, as well as any requirements such as dress or conduct.

Benefits: This should list things that are necessary to carry out the work such as training, insurance, provision of clothing and equipment, and reimbursement of expenses. It should also include any additional rewards your organisation provides such as references, certificates, awards, accreditation and thank-you events.

Marketing

One in three people volunteer and many more would do so if they were asked. Successful recruitment depends on being clear about the sort of people most likely to do the particular work on offer, and devising imaginative ways of to attract them to your organisation.

Who will do it?

Some people are motivated by the opportunity to use existing skills and experience, and others by the chance to work for a specific cause or with a particular client group.

Where to find them

If the work involves specific skills and experience, target places where you will find people with these skills and experience. For example, if you are looking for drivers, ask to put posters in garages and petrol stations.

How to attract them

Recruitment has a lot in common with marketing – selling the organisation and its opportunities in a way that makes people want to invest their time in it.

Word of mouth recruitment: Most people volunteer because someone asks them. Many people are never asked, and yet the potential for their involvement is enormous. The best advertisement comes from volunteers themselves who will be more likely to ask friends and family to join them if they find their own volunteering experience rewarding. Staff, committee members and service users are all potential ambassadors for the organisation. One problem with word-of-mouth recruitment is 'cloning' - people recruiting others with similar backgrounds. This can be off-putting to potential volunteers who don't 'match' the profile, so use word-of-mouth in conjunction with other recruitment methods.

Volunteer centres: Recruiting volunteers is their business so go along and talk to them about different options

Publicity: Written publicity in the form of posters, leaflets, or adverts should be targeted at areas most likely to contain people with the right profile. The message should be brief and imaginative to catch people's attention and appeal directly to people with the kind of motive you are looking for e.g.

- People are hungry, someone should do something about that, be somebody – Call....
- Mr Jones is very lonely, no-one understands him; do you speak Welsh and have a few hours to spare? Phone ...
- Do you like football? So does Benjamin. Why not help him enjoy it! Phone...

Talks and presentations: Give talks to schools, colleges, youth centres; contact major employers for presentations to pre-retirement groups; target further education courses, and businesses with people who have the skills you want. Take a volunteer along who can talk about what it's like and answer questions raised by potential volunteers.

Media publicity, community service announcements: Only do this if you are geared up to deal with a potential flood of applicants!

As volunteers are not paid, it is essential that volunteering opportunities are as appealing and attractive as possible to capture people's interest on a broad scale. To ensure you have as diverse a team as possible it is important to take steps for the message to get into 'hard to reach' communities. Retaining volunteers

Do

- Try to understand what motivates people to volunteer with your organisation in the first place.
- Be clear about how realistic volunteers' expectations are and how (if at all) they can be met.
- Seek clear feedback from volunteers about their involvement with the organisation (e.g. regular support & supervision sessions, short questionnaires, exit interviews).
- Personalise volunteers' roles and create as much variety in their tasks

as possible. This allows the option of creating new areas of work and re-motivating volunteers.

- Be aware of barriers to volunteering. Many people stop volunteering because they find that they cannot afford it. Re-imbursing 'out of pocket' expenses is a very important way of helping people to volunteer.
- Make volunteers feel welcome and aware that their work is valued and valuable. Involve volunteers in decision-making processes as much as possible.

Don't

- Hang on to volunteers steadfastly when it might actually be better for them and the organisation if they ended their involvement.
- Neglect the views and feelings of other employees (especially if you are placing volunteers to work with them). If they are feeling negative about working with volunteers this will probably undermine all your hard work on recruitment.
- Allocate tasks to volunteers that no-one else wants to do. Asking someone to do 450 sheets of photocopying and nothing else every week is unlikely to encourage them to stay!
