

Voluntary and Community Action

Learning and Skills Development

Training Information Sheet No. 1

June 2007

The Training service provides a programme of popular and exciting training events to meet the learning and skills development needs of employees, volunteers and trustees of voluntary organisations and community groups.



Those who work in local voluntary organisations and community groups; whether staff, volunteers or management committee members are crucial to the success of their organisation or group. Keeping things going, developing new services, responding to funders' demands, client expectations and changing legislation all require those involved to learn from what they, and others, do and develop new skills. Time invested in ensuring that everyone has the appropriate skills to carry out their roles effectively increases your chances of meeting these demands.

Benefits

Effective learning and skills development brings benefits to all concerned. Benefits for individuals include increased motivation, morale, and job satisfaction; individuals feel more capable to undertake their roles; they gain increased employability skills, empowerment and the ability to get more involved in the organisation. Learning also enables people to develop networks and contacts, a sense of achievement and improved performance.

Benefits to organisations can include increased effectiveness and efficiency; improved quality of service; ability to comply with legislation, regulations and quality standards. Fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement may result in less resistance to change, greater flexibility and improve retention of volunteers, staff and trustees. It can also provide an increased level of knowledge, understanding and skills within the organisation.

Identifying Training Needs

For training to be effective and appropriate it is necessary to know what the training needs of the

organisation, its staff, volunteers and trustees/management committee members are. Some of the ways in which this can be done are outlined below.

Surveys – A brief questionnaire asking staff, volunteers and trustees what they feel their training needs are, giving them some priority order, along with some indication of what barriers there might be to them participating. Try not to raise expectations that all the training needs will be met.

Induction – This should inform new employees, volunteers and trustees of everything they need to know about the organisation and their role within it, and may help to identify new training needs.

Supervision – Regular supervision sessions between volunteers/staff and the line manager to discuss work programmes and issues can highlight short and long-term training needs.

Appraisal – This should take place at least annually and include an opportunity to identify training needs either through highlighting changes in job role that might require further support, future

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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY LEARNING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT?

The phrase *learning and skills development*, along with the word *training* (used throughout this information sheet for brevity), can be interpreted in different ways and may include:

- coaching
- action learning
- workshops
- away-days
- mentoring
- distance Learning
- courses
- team development
- non-managerial supervision
- e-learning
- networking
- work experience
- shadowing
- knowledge sharing
- conferences
- learning by doing.

aspirations and/or areas requiring improved performance.

New Projects/Initiatives – When new projects are being developed, or new technology systems are introduced, ensure an assessment of the training needs of staff and volunteers is included.

Response to Critical Incidents – If an accident occurs, or there is cause for concern in a specific area of the service, this may identify a training need. For example, dealing with an aggressive client might heighten the need for staff/volunteers to be more prepared to deal with such clients.

New Legislation – The introduction of new legislation can automatically create a training need, for example, the introduction of new employment legislation will mean people with a Personnel/Human Resources responsibility will need to learn the new requirements.

Occupational or Quality Standards – Increasingly the sector is seeing the development, introduction and implementation of quality assurance systems and occupational standards, which in turn will create training needs.

Barriers to Training

A lack of time, money and resources, and pressure of work, often constrain participation in training. Other barriers can include transport, accessible venues, appropriate trainers, childcare, people's attitude to training, knowledge of what training is available and motivation.

Having a commitment to training and using some creative thinking will help to overcome some of these barriers. For example, ensuring that travel expenses can be claimed through the normal

channels; bringing trainers and consultants in-house to run tailored training; using other methods such as mentoring, distance learning, E-Learning and providing access to appropriate journals and publications (and the time to undertake this type of learning!).

Make a Commitment to Training

Thinking about, and making a written commitment to training, learning and skills development can help. Include this commitment in your service delivery plan, business planning or a Training Policy. Describe in a few sentences the organisation's commitment to training, its importance to the work of the organisation and the benefits it can bring to the organisation (including service users, employees, volunteers and trustees). An example of an opening statement might be *The organisation is committed to the professional development of its staff, volunteers and trustees in order to improve their performance and the quality of the organisation's service.*

Training should also form part of your organisation's equal opportunities policy; for example, *all trustees, staff and volunteers will be given equal opportunity and access to training and professional development to enable them to progress within and outside the organisation.*

Having a designated person within the organisation responsible for training (even if it is only part of their job) can help to encourage the development of employee/volunteer/trustee training. It also ensures there is some knowledge of what is required, what training is available, and its suitability.

Who Should Undertake Training?

Much will depend on the structure of your organisation as to who would be involved in training. If your organisation is managed by trustees or management committee members are they clear about what their roles and responsibilities are, particularly in relation to the legal, financial and strategic management of the organisation?

If your organisation uses volunteers to deliver services, how familiar are they with the work of the organisation and the client group(s) with which you work? Providing training for volunteers can help to improve their skills in delivering the organisation's services, provide motivation and might enhance their employability.

If your organisation employs staff, all should be eligible for training and not just full-time staff or those in managerial positions. Adequate arrangements should also be made for part-time staff to be involved in training, for example, arranging training on days when part-time staff are available.

Training Available

Some of the different types of training that may be considered include:

Internal Training – This can take many different forms, for example, having a training element in team meetings, bringing external expertise in-house, shadowing, mentoring and away-days.

Short Courses – Training that enables people to attend a course or workshop for a short period of time (half, one or two days), learn about a specific subject and then come back and put it into practice.

Examples include Computer Software Packages, First Aid or Volunteer Recruitment.

Accredited Training and Professional Development – Training that leads to certification, for example, NVQs; Open College Network accredited courses, Diplomas, Degrees and Masters. They provide participants with both the knowledge and skills to carry out a specific role and the qualification, which can be transferable and may assess competency. Some courses can be quite demanding in time commitment, anything from a year upwards.

Update/Renewal Training – Some training, for example First Aid or Manual Handling, may require refresher training periodically to ensure the skills and knowledge are still current. Build these in to any training plan, especially if there is a legal requirement for people to hold this training.

Induction Training – This should inform new employees, volunteers and trustees of everything they need to know about the organisation in order for them to become effective in their role quickly. A good induction programme is vital if you wish to create an atmosphere of Continued Professional Development across the organisation.

Network Meetings and Conferences – Provide staff with the opportunity to discuss ideas with colleagues from other areas, to share and learn from good practice, and participate in informal training workshops, which may run along side or as a part of local networks or conferences. They also provide you with the



TRAINING COSTS ARE LIKELY TO INCLUDE:

- training course and workshop fees
- the cost of attendance at conferences and network meetings
- providing a consultant/trainer for in-house training
- travel expenses, meals and accommodation (perhaps met from an existing travel budget)
- learning materials (perhaps met from an existing publications budget).

time and space to think about your work; this can often be lost in a busy day-to-day working environment.

Meeting the Cost of Training

It is important to include provision for training within your organisation's general budget for core services and as part of any project budgets. Where an organisation's general funds are limited or 'tight' there may be a tendency not to make provision for training. This can be a retrograde step; making some small provision is better than nothing.

Imaginative ways of securing funds or training itself should be considered. These could include:

- making sure you always include the cost of training in grant applications
- applying to funders that specifically grant aid for capacity building and training
- conference bursary schemes for attendees from organisations on low incomes
- identifying 'free' or subsidised training provided by Voluntary and Community Action and other umbrella organisations
- volunteers on benefits can obtain training at reduced rates through local colleges
- if you belong to a membership-

based organisation, a national association or regional network, they may offer a certain amount of training free to members

- access training places offered by other organisations or offer spare places on your own training to other organisations to help spread the cost.

Monitoring and Evaluation

It is good practice to review and evaluate people's participation in training. This could be through supervision and/or appraisal where regular discussions will enable you to identify training needs, plan a way of meeting those needs, opportunities to review their participation in specific training opportunities, both during (in the case of long term courses) and upon completion. Remember to consider how the learning gained can be applied within the organisation, for example, sharing information with others or taking on new responsibilities related to the learning.

Evaluate whether the training provider and/or course attended were delivered to an appropriate standard and whether other colleagues might also benefit or whether you wish to use that provider again. Training needs, your training programme and budget should be reviewed at least annually.



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How can our Training Service help?

For further information on how Voluntary and Community Action can help your organisation or group with its training, learning and skills development, contact our Training Officer on 01525 850559.

E-Training Bulletin

To receive a regular listing of all our events and those from other training providers across Bedfordshire and Luton, send an email to info@action-southbeds.org.uk with 'E-Training Bulletin' as the subject.