



Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

a short guide for voluntary
organisations



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Why use volunteers?

If you are at the stage of not yet involving volunteers, but are thinking of doing so, the first very important question to ask is **Why Use Volunteers?** Whether or not to take on volunteers is not a decision that should be taken lightly and it needs commitment right through the organisation. You need to look at the reasons for taking on volunteers, what their roles will be and how they will be managed. Perhaps the best way to see the involvement of volunteers in your organisation is to look at volunteering as complementing paid work, bringing 'added value to your work'. Working with volunteers should be a mutually beneficial relationship.

Overcoming fears of existing staff

Occasionally it can happen that if an organisation makes a decision to involve volunteers in its work, existing staff members can feel threatened by the encroachment of volunteers - perhaps even fear that they may lose their jobs. The decision to bring in volunteers will inevitably have an impact on the organisation and how it works, but a lot of fears can be allayed if a few issues are dealt with:

- Make sure sufficient thought has been given to what the volunteers will be doing and why
- Make sure someone has the role of volunteer coordinator
- Put together a volunteer policy*, involving both staff and volunteers in its construction
- Make sure existing staff are aware that volunteers will be in support roles rather than core roles
- Ensure volunteers have a Task/Role description* which clearly defines the boundaries of their role
- Offer training to anyone supervising volunteers

* The Volunteer Centre can provide sample volunteer policies and task/role descriptions.

For many organisations, taking on volunteers has many benefits. It also has resource implications and is not a step that should be taken lightly. If, when you take time to discuss why you are taking on volunteers, you come up with reasons like they will be cheap labour, or simply you feel you should, it's likely you do not have a valid reason for taking on volunteers. The decision to take on volunteers needs commitment from all levels of the organisation and has many time and resource implications. Providing this is realised, and the whole process managed correctly, volunteers can permit greater flexibility, increase diversity, widen the scope of the organisation's work and be a delight to work with!

Resource implications of involving volunteers

Involving volunteers in your organisation does have a financial impact. The following issues need to be considered:

- You need to budget for out-of pocket expenses
- You might also have to consider financial practices - it may be fine for paid staff to collect expenses at the end of the month but volunteers may need to be reimbursed more regularly
- Volunteers require space and equipment
- There are implications for paid staff. Managing volunteers is a skill - staff who are to be managing volunteers may need training, and managing volunteers will take up some of their time. If you are taking on a significant number of volunteers, you may need to consider having a separate volunteer coordinator

Don't forget, these extra costs – expenses, equipment, training etc should all be built into funding bids.

Volunteer Policy

A volunteer policy is a framework for a volunteer programme. There is no blueprint for the perfect volunteer policy. Each organisation has its own unique needs that should be reflected in its policy, but the following are some of the areas a policy should address:

- An introduction to the work of the organisation, and a statement of principles of the involvement of volunteers in that work
- Recruitment process - how you will advertise for volunteers, whether or not you will use application forms, the interview process, necessary checks, dealing with people you feel are not right for the volunteer role, drawing up volunteer role descriptions, creating a diverse volunteer base
- Induction and training
- Expenses
- Supervision and support
- Insurance
- Equal opportunities
- Health and safety
- Grievance and disciplinary procedures
- Confidentiality

Once the policy is written it makes a good framework for induction meetings with volunteers, and could become part of your induction pack. The Volunteer Centre Bedford can give further assistance with drawing up a Volunteer Policy.

Volunteer Recruitment

At the Centre we are often asked for the magic answer to **volunteer recruitment**. Well I'm afraid there isn't one! When we are in the business of volunteer recruitment, all we can do is try all the methods of recruitment open to us and hope one pays off. Below is a list of possible methods just on the remote chance there may be one you haven't thought of

- Posters
- Leaflets
- Television
- Radio
- Newspaper
- Talks
- Exhibitions
- Register with the Volunteer Centre
- Insert in programmes - e.g. theatre, football
- Target a particular group - e.g. young people, mums, retired people
- Speak to existing staff and volunteers

If you are planning a **recruitment campaign**, consider the timing of it. **January, September and Volunteers Week in June** are often good times for a recruitment drive. Think about your **recruitment message**, too. Consider what **motivates people to volunteer**, what people might perceive as **barriers to volunteering**, and try to address those in your message. Finally, be prepared and ready to **follow up** all those new enquiries (hopefully!!)

Registration Form

At an initial interview with a potential new volunteer, it is a good idea to have some kind of **'registration' form** to complete with them. This form will obviously vary according to the type of organisation, but as well as basic personal details, there should be an opportunity for you, as the volunteer-involving organisation, to establish the volunteer's **interests, skills, availability** and, above all, **motivations**. If the motivational needs of a potential volunteer can be met by the volunteer position you are offering, the whole volunteering experience is more likely to work and to be a positive one. As the range of people wanting to volunteer becomes more diverse, it is sometimes necessary for an organisation to become more flexible and more **creative** in designing volunteering opportunities. Tasks that are **interesting, challenging** and **rewarding** are more likely to keep volunteers coming back for more. Volunteers should also be able to see how their tasks fit into the overall work of an organisation, and should be allowed some degree of **ownership** and **responsibility**. Volunteers can bring a breath of fresh air into an organisation and, with the luxury of not being bogged down in the day-to-day stuff, can often offer very useful thoughts and ideas.

Task description

When you take on a new volunteer, it is often useful to provide him/her with some sort of **task description**. This does not have to be fixed in tablets of stone, and can be added to or revamped as and when appropriate, but it does mean both the volunteer and the organisation has a clear idea of expectations, and the volunteer is less likely to feel 'put upon'. However, avoid calling it a 'Job description', as this sort of terminology makes it sound more like employment, and could lead to possible problems.

Checks

It is good practice to run **checks** on potential volunteers as a way of protecting any vulnerable groups your volunteers may be working with. These checks should consist of **2 references** and, for some organisations, where the work of volunteers will involve contact with a vulnerable client group, a **Criminal Record Bureau*** check. However, it is important to remember that such checks are only one way of protecting vulnerable groups your volunteers may be working with. **Effective interviewing, training, support and supervision** are equally, if not more, important.

Volunteer agreement **

Some organisations provide their volunteers with a '**volunteer agreement**'. Basically this just sets out what the organisation will commit to and what the volunteer will commit to, and can be signed by both parties. In some ways agreements are a useful tool to help clarify expectations on both sides, but do remember to use the word 'volunteer' throughout, and the term 'agreement' not 'contract' to avoid any confusion with paid employment. Also remember that a 'volunteer agreement' is in no way legally binding and may be cancelled at any time.

* The Volunteer Centre can advise on umbrella organisations that can apply for CRB checks on behalf of smaller voluntary groups.

** Sample Volunteer agreements can be downloaded from www.volunteeringengland.org.uk

Reimbursement of expenses

It is Good Practice to **reimburse volunteer expenses** and, wherever possible, organisations should build volunteer expenses into their budget. Volunteers give freely of their time, but should not expect to be out-of-pocket as a result of their voluntary work. However, volunteers should only be reimbursed for **genuine, out-of-pocket expenses** backed up by bus ticket/receipts etc. Where organisations reimburse volunteers petrol money for their journeys from home to their place of volunteering, this is usually calculated on a 'pence per mile' formula. Volunteers should also complete a '**Volunteer Expenses claim sheet**'* which should be signed by the volunteer and authorised by the Chief Officer of the organisation.

Review period

Even with the most careful recruitment and selection, a volunteer placement may not work. It is difficult for a volunteer to know if a particular placement is what he/she really wants to do, and difficult for an organisation to know if a volunteer will match its needs and requirements, until both sides have tried it out. From this point of view it can be useful for both the organisation and the volunteer to **review the placement** after a short period of time – say 3 months – to ensure both sides are happy. This can be an excellent opportunity to iron out any minor problems early on, and can make all the difference between retaining and losing a volunteer. If for instance, a volunteer is happy in the organisation but not in his/her particular role, then it might be possible for the role to be changed. It's all about **communication!**

* The Volunteer Centre can provide a sample claim sheet

Induction

When a new volunteer starts with an organisation, it is important to make sure a staff member is available to give that volunteer induction to the organisation.

Induction should include things such as:

- A tour of the building
- Introductions to staff members and other volunteers
- Health and Safety instructions
- Information about the organisation – its role, history, aims and objectives plus future plans.
- The volunteer's role within the organisation.

Some organisations provide new volunteers with a 'volunteer pack' of information. The more you can make your volunteer feel an integral part of the organisation and not just someone who drifts in once a week, the more likely you are to retain him/her.

Training programme

After induction, many organisations require volunteers to go through a **training programme***, which equips them with the necessary skills to carry out their voluntary role. If your organisation is not one which specifically requires volunteers to undergo training, it is, nevertheless, good practice to make **appropriate training** available to volunteers and, therefore, to include volunteer training as a budget heading.

* North Beds CVS offer a range of training programmes. Tel: 01234 354366

Supervision and support

Once a volunteer is settled into your organisation, don't forget to give ongoing support and supervision, to make sure things continue to run smoothly.

Methods of supervision and support can include:

- Formal supervision on a one-to-one basis
- Daily 'checking' to see all is well
- Involving volunteers in staff team meetings, or holding specific meetings for your volunteer team
- Mentoring - matching a new volunteer with an experienced volunteer
- Annual appraisal - a chance to check whether the volunteer's needs and motivations have changed
- Have a 'named person' for volunteers to refer to
- Make sure any work delegated to volunteers is delegated effectively

Look out for signs of stress!

Recognition and rewards

Equally important is the need for **Recognition and Reward** ways of showing your volunteers that their contribution to your work is recognised and valued.

Here are some ways of doing this:

- Show appreciation
- Encourage volunteers to participate in decision making
- Encourage volunteers to become involved in the organisation
- Show interest in the volunteer's 'outside life'
- Give certificates
- Give cards - Birthday, Christmas, Get well etc

- Reimburse volunteer expenses
- Make sure volunteers are covered by your insurance
- Give additional responsibility where appropriate
- Annual outing/treat - remember Volunteers Week
- Enter volunteers for awards EG Whitbread awards
- Include volunteers in your Annual Report
- Invite volunteers to events such as your AGM
- Organise occasional socials

Dealing with problems

From time to time anyone working with volunteers will have to deal with problems. Many can be resolved informally through **supervision** and the all-important **communication**. The 'problem' may be something as simple as the volunteer needing a change of role, or not being suited to a particular role. It may be a volunteer feels underused or badly treated. Whatever the cause, if it can be spotted and aired at an early stage, most problems can be dealt with quickly and easily. However, if it is a problem that cannot be resolved informally, it is important to have a procedure in place. Initial complaints should probably go to the volunteer manager. If the matter is not resolved at this stage, then both parties should have the option to refer to a named person in a more senior position in the organisation. It is important throughout to be up-front and transparent with the volunteer.