



Managing Volunteers

This factsheet is one of 2 in this series on working with volunteers and should be read in conjunction with *Factsheet 12: Volunteer Policies*.

This factsheet covers volunteer management, a topic often overlooked by many organisations once they have managed to involve some volunteers in their work. If care and attention isn't devoted to the volunteers and their work then they can become de-motivated and the experience of volunteering can become a negative one for all involved. In order to avoid this, it is important that volunteers are both valued and managed properly by the organisation they are working with. Below are some tips and ideas about how to effectively manage your organisation's volunteers. They are broken down into 5 sections:

- Recruitment
- Training
- Motivation, Retention and Recognition of Volunteers
- Induction
- Support and Supervision

1: Recruitment

People volunteer for a range of reasons, from a general interest in voluntary work, or a specific interest in the purpose of an organisation, to a desire to learn new skills. It is important when recruiting new volunteers to appreciate the range of reasons they volunteer. It is also important to stress, within the organisation, the benefits of involving volunteers.

Here are some ideas about what to include in advertising material:

- Descriptions of the work volunteers actually do
- What work the organisation as a whole does
- How a new volunteer can make a significant contribution to the work of your organisation
- How volunteering can make a difference to the community
- Benefits of volunteering to the potential volunteer
- How to find out more and what to do next

This information can be used in various ways to attract new volunteers:

- Put up posters in the local area, advertising for volunteers
- Place an ad in the local newspaper or use events and special occasions to get coverage from local press and radio (newsletters, letters to the editor, church magazines, local radio)
- Get existing volunteers, paid staff or clients to tell their friends - word of mouth often works well as an effective form of recruitment
- Give talks or presentations to a targeted audience such as schools, colleges, employers, etc.

Potential volunteers may express concerns and fears about working in situations which are unfamiliar, new or challenging. Addressing these issues will help to clarify what is involved in volunteering and reassure people about their ability to do the work. Here are some suggestions about how to deal with these concerns:

- Have one to one discussions or informal interviews with volunteers as a way of finding out more about the work without making a definite commitment
- Stress that no previous experience is necessary if this is appropriate and accurate
- Emphasise that full training will be given before volunteers are expected to carry out any work
- Offer a trial period that allows volunteers to try out the work without committing themselves

2: Induction

Once volunteers have been accepted into the organisation, a good way of getting things started is to have an induction session in which volunteers are introduced to the organisation. Induction is a formal opportunity for new volunteers to ask questions about the organisation and clarify their role. Good induction should help a volunteer feel part of the organisation and begin to develop a sense of commitment to it.

Induction should include:

- an overview of the work of the organisation
- provision of information about the aims of the project, the work or services involved
- opportunities to meet other paid workers and volunteers

It is a good idea to put together an induction pack so that new volunteers can have all the information they need. An induction pack could include:

- volunteer policy
- volunteer agreement
- voluntary work outline
- equal opportunities policy
- health and safety policy
- information on expenses

3: Training

Volunteers should be provided with all the training they need to carry out their role. If the task is quite demanding or specialised then there will be a need to have some specific training sessions before the volunteers can carry out their work. Having clear and simple voluntary work outlines (see *Factsheet 12: Volunteer Policies*) will help in identifying training needs. A training programme can then be produced to develop the skills and qualities that are needed to carry out the work.

It will also help to identify any on-going training needs that volunteers may have so that training programmes can be developed to facilitate volunteers progress in the organisation.

4: Support and supervision

Regular opportunities for support and supervision are important and can help to identify, and even prevent, de-motivation which can result in volunteers leaving the organisation. Good supervision develops the skills of an individual volunteer and seeks to enhance the quality of service an organisation can offer through its volunteers. It is vital that volunteers are adequately supported in their role and that they are genuinely enabled to deal with the demands of their voluntary work. It is also important that volunteers receive regular feedback on the effectiveness of their work so that any issues can be dealt with as they arise.

The format and regularity of support and supervision will depend on the type of voluntary work people are involved in. This can be provided through a one to one arrangement with a line manager, or a named buddy or mentor. This could be a more experienced volunteer, available to discuss work related issues in confidence. Support and supervision could also be provided on a group basis as this is often more cost effective. Group supervision also has the additional benefits of enabling volunteers to experience a variety of views on the issues being discussed. It is important that there is a supportive and safe environment for regular review meetings with volunteers.

5: Motivation, retention and recognition of volunteers

Once volunteers are working within the organisation it is essential to maintain their motivation and enthusiasm if they are to be retained. Care must be taken to treat volunteers in such a way that they will want to stay with the organisation. Developing activities that meet volunteers' individual needs, provide recognition and appreciation of their work and celebrate a sense of achievement will promote self esteem, strengthen commitment and develop a feeling of belonging and loyalty to the organisation.

Some of the issues that need careful consideration are:

- Regular opportunities to learn new skills
- A sense of personal achievement and contribution to the work of the organisation
- Making a difference to other people's lives, the wider community or environment
- Social needs and making new friends
- Having access to new and different experiences including other forms of voluntary work
- Volunteer appreciation and thanks

Designing volunteer roles and flexible systems that address these issues and provide volunteers with good quality induction, training and support is a complex challenge. However, the payback is skilled volunteers with a high level of motivation and commitment to your organisation.

6: Further help

Green Fish Partnership - www.green-fish.org.uk

Voluntary Action Manchester - 0161 236 3206 or vam@vamanchester.org.uk

National Centre for Volunteering - 020 7520 8900 or www.volunteering.org.uk