



# Working with volunteers

## CORE06

This information sheet is about how to create a productive and welcoming environment for volunteers in your organisation. As such, it covers good practice rather than hard-and-fast rules. For information on your responsibility to keep your volunteers safe and insured, refer to our information sheets CORE07, 'Insurance for voluntary and community groups', and CORE05 'Getting the right policies'.

This sheet covers:

- **Involving volunteers in your organisation**
- **Advertising voluntary opportunities**
- **Interviewing volunteers**
- **Orientation**
- **Motivating and retaining volunteers**

## Involving volunteers in your organisation

The starting point here is your mission statement. This is the phrase which sets out what you are trying to achieve (not what you do to achieve it).

So for example, your mission statement might be:

"Our mission is to put an end to loneliness for older people in West Devon".

When you are thinking about involving new volunteers, you need to be clear about how their involvement will help you achieve your mission.

You can extend this way of thinking into your project plan (see our information sheet CORE09 'Developing a project plan'). At every stage, make sure that you have thought about how volunteers fit into your plans and what you can achieve by involving them. This will ensure that your volunteers are an integral part of the success of your organisation.

As far as possible, be aware of why people might want to volunteer when you are coming up with new roles. If you can create a range of roles suitable for different types of volunteer, you will be more likely to recruit successfully. In basic terms, volunteers tend to fall into two categories: long-term and short-term.

### **Long-term volunteers**

These are people who are dedicated to the cause which you are involved in and will remain with an organisation for many years. They are usually open to various types of work.

Long-term volunteers view their contribution as an altruistic, although they do get a lot out of it too. The recognition and satisfaction of being useful are important, as is the social aspect of being part of a group.

Long-term volunteers are likely to be recruited by contacting you themselves, by becoming increasingly involved time, or by being brought into the organisation through a close connection with existing volunteers.

### **Short-term volunteers**

These tend to be younger and more focussed on what they want to get out of volunteering. While they will support your cause, they are will probably weigh up the opportunities on offer from a variety of organisations before choosing the most appealing one.

Short-term volunteers will be attracted by roles which will develop their own specific skills and improve their CV. A short-term volunteer will usually be keen to get involved in projects where they know exactly what they are being asked to do, and for how long, and where their contribution will have an identifiable impact.

Short-term volunteers are usually recruited by advertisements for particular roles, or through events such as sponsored sports.

There are of course many more, complex reasons why people become volunteers. Some people might be living with problems which make it difficult for them to take on paid work or to socialise – in these cases you will need to be careful and sensitive without unnecessary prying.

There are also all sorts of community involvement programmes for young people, company employees, job seekers and others which come with particular requirements for the 'volunteer', and the organisation they are placed with. For more advice on dealing with a specific type of volunteer, contact your CVS.

## **Advertising voluntary opportunities**

Once you have identified what you need doing, and who might be interested in doing it, you can start to advertise the opportunities you have available. Remember that to recruit good volunteers, your opportunities must be appealing, so always think flexible, achievable, and fun!

Depending on what stage your organisation is at, you may want to undertake a general recruitment campaign, or a targeted drive for a particular role.

In either case, ask your CVS what advertising opportunities are available to local groups. If there is a Volunteer Centre covering your area they can put you in touch. A Volunteer Centre can help advertise your opportunity and put potential volunteers in touch with you.

As well as these formal channels, think creatively about where the sort of people you're looking for might spend time – can you put up an eye-catching poster? Don't forget the local media too – if you need volunteers for an exciting new project, the local paper or radio station might be interested in featuring your call for helpers.

When you are wording your advert, think again about why someone would want to take on this role. Here is a useful structure to follow:

- Need – this could be your need, your clients' or the potential volunteer's.
- Solution – can doing this work help to meet the need?
- Fears/questions – will I be capable of helping?
- Benefits – what's in it for me?
- Contact point – how do I get involved?

Once you have written your advert, get someone else to read it and check it is easy to understand and contains all the necessary information.

## Interviewing volunteers

The key here is to remember that, unlike an interview for a paid post, you should be looking at what role would be right for the person, rather than vice versa. A well-placed volunteer is much more likely to be productive, so it is worth spending time finding out about each person's skills and interests, how and when they like to work, how much time they can reasonably give, and what they are hoping to get out of volunteering.

Be sensitive to what the person wants to do, not just what they can do. For example, you may desperately need a treasurer, but don't assume that a volunteer who happens to be an accountant wants to take on that role – it may well be the last thing he wants to do!

Have a comfortable, private space available for interviews and make sure that everyone who comes along feels welcome. Don't forget that at this stage you haven't yet recruited the person, so use the interview to sell your organisation and the volunteering experience on offer. Take time to explain your cause, your activities, your values and what you hope to achieve by taking on volunteers.

At the end of the interview, if you and the person agree that there may be a suitable role for them within the organisation, explain what the next steps are. It may be that you can offer them the role there and then. It may be that background checks or a training course are required, or that a letter will be sent. Whatever the procedure is, make sure that the person knows what is going to

happen and when it will happen. A potential volunteer who doesn't hear from an organisation will quickly find something else to do.

If you require background checks, make sure that you have obtained all the necessary permissions from the applicant. If you are unsure about whether you need checks or how to get them done, contact your CVS for advice.

If at the end of the interview you can't see a role for the person within your organisation, politely explain that you have no suitable opportunities at the present time.

## Orientation and training

When new volunteers join your organisation, a good orientation procedure will help them settle in smoothly. You will probably want to create an information pack or handbook for each new person, and combine this with a tour and introductions.

However you carry out orientation, there are three areas which you need to cover:

- The cause – this should give the volunteer an understanding of your mission, the need behind it, and the history of your organisation.
- The systems – all new volunteers should understand what is expected of them, what activities are carried out when, where things are, and who is in charge.
- The people – help new volunteers feel part of the team with introductions to staff and volunteers. This could be done with welcoming events, or with a buddy system where existing volunteers are assigned to help new ones settle in.

### **A note about volunteer agreements**

As part of orientation, you may want to provide a volunteer agreement which sets out what you expect the volunteer to do, and what you will provide. This is a good idea as it clarifies responsibilities and expectations on both sides.

However, since the introduction of the minimum wage in the UK, there have been a few cases of volunteers testing the law to claim that they should be paid because they had a 'contract of employment'. Although this shouldn't alarm you, it is advisable to avoid any grey areas in written documents or adverts. Make sure that you never refer to a volunteer's role as a 'job'. If you create an agreement about the role, avoid wording such as 'the volunteer must....', or any other phrases which could reasonably be construed as creating a contractual obligation. Your agreement should state that you will reimburse out of pocket expenses, but never agree to pay a volunteer an honorarium or allowance in advance.

There is an example of a volunteer agreement at the end of this sheet.

## Motivating and retaining volunteers

If your volunteers have been well-placed and well-orientated, and are enthusiastic about helping you achieve your mission, you are well on the way to a happy, motivated volunteer team.

Don't be complacent though – a culture of recognising volunteers and keeping motivation high over time will pay dividends.

Make sure that all volunteers know who they can turn to for help, whether that is an established volunteer or a member of staff. Whoever has responsibility for volunteers should make time to listen to their team, and not just when there is a problem. You may like to do this through regular meetings, or on a more informal basis.

One of the best ways to engage long-term interest from volunteers is to create an environment where people can learn and progress. Make sure that training is available for those volunteers who want it – this might be provided by you or by external organisations. Your CVS will be able to advise you about affordable and appropriate courses.

As well as training, make sure that you recognise achievement by all volunteers, whatever their level of ability. You can make a series of certificates to reward length of service for example. A volunteer who feels appreciated is far more likely to be motivated and loyal than one who feels taken for granted.

You can combine formal methods of recognition with fun events to say thank you. One Devon organisation organises an annual 'Oscars' ceremony for its volunteers, with awards in a host of light-hearted categories. A good time to organise events like this is during Volunteers' Week, which usually takes place in June – this gives you an opportunity to take advantage of national branding and publicity. Your CVS will be able to tell you about how to get involved.

## Summary

Recruiting and managing volunteers can be challenging, but if you remain clear about their role, and make sure they are well looked after, your organisation will reap huge benefits. If you want to learn more about volunteer management, there is lots of in-depth literature available from organisations such as NCVO ([www.ncvo-vol.org.uk](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk)) and the Directory of Social Change ([www.dsc.org.uk](http://www.dsc.org.uk)).

For individual support, talk to staff at your CVS who will be able to advise you.

## Sample volunteer agreement

Volunteers are an important and valued part of [name of organisation]. We hope that you enjoy volunteering with us and feel part of our team.

This agreement tells you what you can expect from us, and what we hope from you. We aim to be flexible, so please let us know if you would like to make any changes to your role with us.

### **We, [name of organisation], will do our best:**

- to introduce you to the organisation and your role in it.
- to provide any training you need.
- to do our best to help you develop your volunteering role with us.
- to provide regular meetings with your supervisor for mutual feedback. Your supervisor's name is [ .....]
- to respect your skills, dignity and wishes and to do our best to accommodate them.
- to reimburse out of pocket expenses incurred while volunteering for us, up to our current maximum.
- to consult with you and keep you informed of possible changes.
- to insure you against injury you suffer or cause due to negligence.
- to provide a safe workplace.
- to apply our equal opportunities policy
- to try to resolve fairly any problems, grievances and difficulties you may have while you volunteer with us.

### **I, [name of volunteer], agree to do my best:**

- to work reliably to the best of my ability
- to give as much warning as possible whenever I cannot work when expected
- to follow [name of organisation]'s rules and procedures, including health and safety, equal opportunities and confidentiality.

This agreement is binding in honour only, is not intended to be a legally binding contract between us. This agreement may be cancelled at any time at the discretion of either party. Neither party intends any employment relationship to be created now or at any time in the future.

Signed:

.....  
Volunteer

.....  
[name and role of supervisor]  
[name of organisation]

Date: .....

Date: .....