

# engaging volunteers all you need to know

Recruiting and retaining volunteers is a very competitive business. There are plenty of other organisations and pastimes other than yours that potential volunteers can get involved with/in. There are no guarantees that your organisation will recruit and retain volunteers successfully from the word go, but by keeping abreast of good practice in volunteer management and recruitment, and implementing it, this can only boost your success rate when engaging volunteers within your organisation.

The aim of this guide is to offer you some ideas and tips on issues you may wish to consider when involving volunteers within your organisation, such as: who can volunteer, recruiting volunteers, and good practice policies which will help you to retain your volunteers.

## What is a Volunteer?

A volunteer is anyone who is providing a service, without pay, to the benefit of people, groups, communities or the environment. It is a commitment to offer time and energy without financial gain. A volunteer's role within your organisation should be to complement the work of paid staff, not become a substitute for it.

## Who can Volunteer?

The general rule is there are no limitations on who can volunteer. People have the right to volunteer regardless of age, ability and financial status. However, there are considerations that will need to be taken into account. The following information will guide you through some of the more general queries often related to volunteering:

### Involving young volunteers

While there are legal restrictions on employing young people, they do not in general apply to recruiting young volunteers (under the age of 16). However, even if your organisation is not bound by it, it is worth being aware of the legislation.

Section 18 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and subsequent amendments limit employment to those aged 13 or over. The Act states that *no child under minimum school leaving age may be employed before 7am or after 7pm on any day, or for more than two hours on any school day or Sunday*. The legislation also requires that children must have a minimum of two weeks free from work during the school holidays.

A potential young volunteer will have many commitments and you will need to take into account how much time is spent on these commitments. They include for example:

- ◆ school/college commitments;
- ◆ homework;
- ◆ sports and social activities; and
- ◆ family commitment eg: caring for a sibling, parent etc.

It is advisable to acquire parental/guardian consent when involving young volunteers. Both the young person and their parent or guardian should be fully aware of what the volunteering will entail. Provide, if you can, clear information about the organisation and the duties the volunteer is expected to do, preferably a task description. Make sure that the volunteer and their family are aware of time commitments, where the work will take place and how it will be supervised.

## Involving refugees and asylum seekers

Since April 2000, asylum seekers (people in the process of applying for refugee status) have been allowed to volunteer. This includes those that are appealing against a decision to refuse them asylum, and those whose application has been turned down, but are registered with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for return to their home country when practical. Whilst asylum seekers receive a document declaring that they must not engage in paid or unpaid work, this in fact does not include genuine voluntary work. Home Office guidance states that care should be taken to ensure that activity undertaken by an asylum seeker is for a not-for-profit organisation, and does not amount to either employment or job substitution. It confirms that asylum seekers are entitled to receive out-of-pocket expenses just like other volunteers.

For Home Office guidance see: <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/voluntaryworkers/>

## Involving volunteers from overseas

There is no restriction on people from EU countries coming to the UK to volunteer. People from outside the EU who have a visa to work or study in the UK may volunteer as long as they are still undertaking the activity that is stated on their visa. It is possible to get a visa to come to the UK to volunteer, but this must be arranged in advance and certain restrictions apply.

## Volunteering and Welfare Benefits

Genuine voluntary work should not affect a volunteer's entitlement to any benefit.

**Volunteers claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)** - JSA claimants must remain available for work and must be actively seeking work. In a concession from the general rules on availability, volunteers do not have to be available to start work immediately. They must be able to start work with one week's notice, or attend an interview for work at 48 hours' notice.

**Volunteers claiming Income Support** - People on Income Support are fully entitled to volunteer for as many hours as they like. As with JSA, they should not receive any income from their voluntary work other than genuine reimbursement of expenses, or they could face deductions from their benefit.

**Volunteers claiming Incapacity Benefit** - People on incapacity benefit are fully entitled to volunteer. Volunteering should not call into question a person's incapacity to work. There are no hour limits on volunteering by people on incapacity benefit. In the past there was a limit of 16 hours per week on average, but this was removed in October 1998.

## Recruiting Volunteers

There are many ways to recruit your potential volunteers, some more effective than others. It is safe to say always ensure your publicity is accessible and looks professional. A poorly laid-out, badly photocopied poster will not give out a very good first impression to your prospective volunteer. The following tips can help you on your way:

- ◆ Be aware of trying to fit too much information in too small a space.
- ◆ Use colours sparingly in text.
- ◆ Ensure all the information needed is on the poster:
  - the name of your organisation; a contact telephone number; and very briefly, what the volunteering opportunity is.
- ◆ Try to create a title that will grab your readers' attention, for example:

**"What are you doing on Wednesday?"**  
**"Everybody's Got Life Skills, We Need Yours"**  
**"Go on Give it a Go"**

Now you have your poster, make the most of it. The following list will give you some ideas of where to advertise, many of which are free:

- ◆ Your local Volunteer Centre.
- ◆ Your local Council for Voluntary Service.
- ◆ Places of worship, e.g. mosques, churches, temples, synagogues.
- ◆ Meeting/leisure places, parks, clubs, cafes, pubs, Sports centres.
- ◆ Shopping centres, markets, supermarkets and shops.
- ◆ The local Jobcentre.
- ◆ Local Authority and Council offices.
- ◆ Doctors surgeries or hospital waiting rooms.
- ◆ Nurseries, schools or adult education colleges.
- ◆ Public libraries.
- ◆ Post offices.
- ◆ Local and free newspapers (through adverts or a weekly column).
- ◆ Community and hospital radio stations.
- ◆ Seasonal and community events, such as fairs or car boot sales.

## Interviewing Volunteers

Now you have people hammering at your door to volunteer, don't let them get away! Try to get them on board as soon as possible, before someone else does.

- ◆ Arrange for them to come for an interview or an 'informal chat' as soon as possible.
- ◆ If you require references, ask the volunteer to bring the details along with them.
- ◆ Explain what voluntary roles you have on offer in your organisation.  
Talk it through with the prospective volunteer, asking them what they would like to do.
- ◆ Offer some examples of what they will receive in return. However, be honest and only state what your organisation is capable of. This could include the following:
  - Regular support sessions.
  - Regular volunteer forums.
  - Training and development opportunities.
  - Involvement in team meetings, staff conferences and members' events.
  - Recognition of volunteer work.
  - Social events.
  - Out-of-pocket expenses eg travel and lunch.
- ◆ It is important to communicate the outcome of the interview. Explain the procedure and the timescale. If you decide you want to take them on as a volunteer, give them the opportunity to consider and reflect.
- ◆ In many cases Criminal Record (CRBS) checks are required, which can delay a volunteer starting. Keep them interested by providing them with an information pack to take away about your organisation, and keep them fully informed of the progress of the CRBS check.

## Induction for new Volunteers

An induction programme is an essential part of any new member joining your organisation. Your new volunteer may have been away from the 'labour market' for a length of time, be lacking in confidence, or may still not quite be sure if volunteering is for them. An induction welcomes them to your organisation and helps them feel more at ease. What you include in your induction process should be as informative as it would be for a paid member of staff. The following is a guide to what can be included:

- ◆ A tour of the layout of the building (including fire escapes, toilets, etc).
- ◆ If it is a shared building, give a brief overview of who else uses the building.
- ◆ An introduction to other members of the organisation.

- ♦ If office based, show the volunteer where they will be placed.
- ♦ Health and safety issues ie evacuations procedure, who the appointed First Aid person is, how accidents should be reported.
- ♦ Explain how and what expenses can be claimed.
- ♦ The allocation of a parking permit if required.
- ♦ An explanation of data protection, confidentiality, phone and Internet use.

Most importantly, do not forget to inform them of breaks and lunch times; this is one of the most common items to be overlooked. Some organisations have very informal break times (ie whenever required), whereas others will be more formal and have set agreed times for breaks.

You will need certain information from your volunteer for your organisational records. This can be obtained by asking the volunteer to complete a few forms, either on their own or with your support. The following list will give you some ideas as to what you will require:

- ♦ Full name.
- ♦ Address (including postcode).
- ♦ Telephone number (home and mobile if applicable).
- ♦ Emergency contact details.
- ♦ Doctor's contact details.
- ♦ Any health issues that the organisation will need to be aware of for the protection of the volunteer and the organisation (eg diabetes, heart condition, arthritis, epilepsy).

## A Volunteer agreement

A volunteer agreement may sound rather formal; however, as long as the organisation avoids any form of obligation or contractual language, the risk is outweighed by the benefits of having a written agreement. The agreement will show a commitment from the organisation, and set out what is expected of both parties. Depending on the nature of the volunteering opportunity, a volunteer agreement may include any or all of the following:

- ♦ Nature and purpose of the voluntary tasks.
- ♦ Hours and days the volunteer has agreed to undertake.
- ♦ Name and position of the person within the organisation who will support/supervise the volunteer.
- ♦ The volunteer's agreement to abide by the organisation's objects, its equal opportunities policy, health and safety policy, confidentiality policy etc.
- ♦ Arrangements for the volunteer's support session (reviewing of the volunteer's tasks, dealing with any problems that may arise etc).
- ♦ Notice the organisation would like to have when the volunteer requires time off, and who to notify.
- ♦ When and who to notify if the volunteer is unable to attend due to illness.
- ♦ The fact that the organisation and volunteer do not intend this agreement to be a legally binding document.

The agreement should be signed and dated both by the volunteer and the authorised person within the organisation. A copy should be kept by the organisation and the original retained by the volunteer.

The fact that the agreement is in writing and is signed does not mean that it is a contract. A contract is a legal relationship based on the nature of an agreement, and may be created regardless of whether or not an agreement is in writing.

## Volunteer Expenses

The reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses should be made available to all volunteers and will normally cover agreed travel costs. The following list will give you an idea of what other items can be classed as 'out-of-pocket expenses':

- ◆ Meals if volunteering for more than four hours, or over a mealtime.
- ◆ Specialist clothing.
- ◆ Tools.
- ◆ Actual costs of dependent care.
- ◆ Training.
- ◆ If volunteering from own home:
  - stationery;
  - postage; and
  - telephone or computer costs.

This list is not exhaustive and your organisation may have further costs for which the volunteer may need to be reimbursed. The following rule should be applied to all reimbursement of expenses. Expenses must be:

- 1) reimbursement of actual expenditure;
- 2) wholly necessary for the work; and
- 3) authorised as genuine.

HM Revenue and Customs sets a tax-free approved mileage rate for reimbursing travel expenses for people using their own vehicles for volunteering or employment. These can be obtained from HM Revenue and Customs:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/mileage/volunteer-drivers.htm>

## Insurance

Volunteers are not automatically covered by insurance; it is good practice to check with your insurer that volunteers are included in the cover your organisation already has. If your organisation has Public Liability Insurance, this covers non-employees in the event of death, damage to property, loss of property and injury. It is essential to confirm with your insurance company that this policy also covers the acts of volunteers.

If your organisation has Employers' Liability Insurance (this is required by law if the organisation employs paid staff), this can be extended to cover the acts of volunteers.

The following list includes other types of insurance that are available:

- ◆ Personal accident cover.
- ◆ Protection of no-claims for volunteer drivers.
- ◆ Professional indemnity.
- ◆ Trustee liability.
- ◆ Legal claims insurance.

## Unacceptable/Acceptable language

One of the trickier volunteering issues has long been the unclear boundary where volunteers can become workers or employees in the eyes of the law. Such a change in status can bring volunteers under the protection of employment legislation.

The following list is a guide to what language to use for volunteers to determine the difference between volunteer and employee.

Employee	Volunteer
Contract	Arrangement
Employer	Organisation
Employee	Volunteer
Unpaid staff member	Volunteer
Payment	Reimbursement for expenses
Annual leave	Arrangements for time off
Sick leave	Arrangements for when ill
Job description	Task description
Supervision/appraisal	Support session
Disciplinary procedure	Arrangements for if there are problems
Grievance procedure	Arrangements if the volunteer has a complaint or is unhappy
Dismissal	Ending the arrangement
Redundancy	No further need for the volunteer's tasks

## Where to go for help

There are many organisations offering support and advice for organisations involving volunteers, many of which are accessible via the Internet. Examples of the support available are as follows:

[www.vcaberdeenshire.org.uk](http://www.vcaberdeenshire.org.uk) - Volunteer Centre Aberdeenshire (VCA) have a shire-wide remit to promote volunteering in all its forms. VCA is part of a Scottish network of over 32 Volunteer Centres and supported by grants from the Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council. Their website provides information and advice on volunteering in your area, support for organisations and links to Volunteer Scotland where you can look for volunteering opportunities. Similarly, groups can also register here if they would like to advertise their volunteering opportunities.

[www.volunteerscotland.org.uk](http://www.volunteerscotland.org.uk) - The Volunteer Scotland website holds a database of thousands of volunteering opportunities across Scotland. Simply type in your postcode and areas of volunteering that interest you and this site will do the rest.

[www.doit.org.uk](http://www.doit.org.uk) - Doit.org.uk holds a national database of volunteering opportunities which is free for potential volunteers to access.

[www.volresource.org.uk](http://www.volresource.org.uk) - VolResource offer a quick and easy way to get to useful information on anything to do with running a voluntary organisation (whether a community group, charity or other non-profit body), via online links.

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