

# Involving Volunteers

This information leaflet will help you to successfully involve volunteers in your organisation. It suggests some general points to think about and tells you how to find out more.

## Top down commitment

Before starting out, you should think carefully about why you want volunteers, and what you can offer them. If working with volunteers is to be successful, it is essential to get agreement from all staff about their involvement prior to starting. Sometimes paid staff can feel threatened by the fear that volunteers will take over, or that they are an easy option for dealing with a large workload. Make sure that there is a genuine role for a volunteer before you start recruiting. While each case for volunteer involvement is a matter of judgement, volunteers are not substitutes for paid workers; nor should volunteers be recruited if there isn't suitable work for them to do.

To involve volunteers in a constructive and positive way does not come as a cheap alternative to paid staff. It will involve staff and committee time to develop policies and practices, time and resources for ongoing training and support, and money to reimburse expenses.

In the early stages, many organisations write a volunteer policy, to record the thinking that has gone on in preparation for working with volunteers. This may cover equal opportunities, recruitment, training and support.

If volunteers are to feel their work is worthwhile and rewarding, it is vital to identify clear roles. This is usually recorded in a volunteer arrangement - a document that can be referred to by volunteers and the organisation to identify the rights and responsibilities of both parties. The arrangement may cover time commitment, behaviour and support.

Legally, volunteers are not employees, so although an arrangement is not a contract it can be useful to identify the hopes and expectations of both the volunteer and the organisation.

## Preparation

Before recruiting a volunteer it's necessary to identify what resources will be needed in terms of:

- Time: for recruitment and selection, training new volunteers, satisfying the ongoing support needs of volunteers
- Resources: including office space, access to computers
- Finances: including reimbursement of expenses, costs of criminal records checks and any extra insurance cover that might be required.

## Recruitment

People have a variety of motives for becoming a volunteer. If you already have volunteers in your group or organisation, try asking them what led to their involvement and how they heard about you. The most successful technique of recruiting volunteers is through word of mouth, so it's important that as many people as possible know about your need for volunteers, what volunteers do, and the benefits from volunteering in your organisation.

People have different motivations for volunteering and it is necessary to reflect this in any recruitment publicity you produce. It is important to emphasise what the volunteers will get out of their commitment, in return for the time they put into it.

Many organisations (often unintentionally) discriminate against some groups of people. By actively working to diversify the pool of volunteers, an organisation can demonstrate its commitment to equal opportunities and can, with little extra work, substantially increase the number of people coming forward to volunteer.

A great deal of time and effort can be put into recruiting volunteers. If the support and training structures are not in place, however, there is a high chance that the volunteer will not stop with you very long.

## Selection

Consider what methods you will use to decide whether a potential volunteer is suitable to become involved in the work of your organisation. Many organisations devise a simple information pack and application form. They meet with the potential volunteer for an interview, chat or induction, depending on the purpose of an initial meeting and how formal it is. Organisations can also take up references. Those working with vulnerable people will need to carry out a criminal record check.

Some people will be put off volunteering with you if they have too many 'obstacles' to overcome before they can volunteer. As a general rule of thumb the more time and responsibility that will be given to a volunteer, the more rigorous the selection process should be. Increasingly, organisations are taking on volunteers for a trial period.

If at any stage of the selection process, you feel that a volunteer is not suitable, then it is important to refer them on to sources of information about other volunteering opportunities (Sheffield Volunteer Bureau can help you with this). Just because a volunteer is not right for your organisation does not mean that they would not be well suited elsewhere.

## Training

It is essential that new volunteers are provided with induction and suitable training. You should identify who is going to spend time with a new volunteer and what the induction needs to cover for the volunteer to feel welcomed and fully informed. It is a good idea to tell volunteers about the organisation, its values and aims, and provide copies of relevant policies. The new volunteer could then 'sit in with' an experienced volunteer to learn about the work. More formal training may be needed eg. lifting and handling, HIV/Aids awareness, equal opportunities. This may involve paying a trainer to come to train a group of your volunteers, paying for your volunteers to go on a course, or putting on the training yourself. Many organisations offer their volunteers access to accredited training (eg. through the Open College Network or National Vocational Qualifications). This not only gives extra value to the training a volunteer receives, but can also be an additional 'hook' to use in recruiting.

## Support and supervision

All volunteers who contribute to your organisation should be supported in carrying out their work. Without adequate support volunteers may not feel valued and may then decide to leave.

- The practical support that volunteers require includes:
- Reimbursement of expenses incurred through volunteering. Direct reimbursement of costs avoids problems with welfare benefit payments, Inland Revenue, and prevents a blurring of lines between volunteers and paid staff.
- Travel expenses, childcare, dependent care and lunch expenses can all be reimbursed.
- Suitable insurance to cover the organisation against the volunteer being injured, and to cover claims from third parties arising from the actions of volunteers.
- Personal accident insurance to compensate volunteers for injury suffered in the course of volunteering.
- Protective clothing that might be required in order to minimise any risks to your volunteers.
- Equipment to do the job.
- Improving accessibility ie. facilities to cater for specific needs to enable people to volunteer.

For some, the possibility of working flexible hours or changing the way the work is organised to suit their availability, will be useful.

Volunteers also require personal support. This can be time and space to talk about how they are finding the work, opportunities for feedback, gathering information and so on. There are many ways of providing personal support ranging from regular one to one supervision sessions to informal volunteer get together. Setting aside the time to provide informal support to volunteers is vital if they are to feel valued and stay motivated. It might be that there is an open door policy to deal with questions from volunteers. Often support need only be simple, such as sending a birthday card.

The golden rule in terms of retaining volunteers is one of communication. If volunteers are involved in the decision making and planning processes of the organisation they will be more likely to keep coming back. Always take the time to find out how the volunteer is. Get to know them and never underestimate the value of saying thank you. This shows that you have noticed what they do and of course it also happens to cost nothing but your time.

## Organisations that can advise and help

### **Voluntary Action Sheffield**

The Circle  
33 Rockingham Lane  
Sheffield  
S1 4FW  
Tel: 0114 253 6600  
Fax: 0114 253 6601  
Website: <http://www.vas.org.uk/>

### **Volunteering England**

Regent's Wharf  
8 All Saints Street  
London N1 9RL  
United Kingdom  
Tel: 020 7713 6161  
Fax: 020 7713 6300  
Email:  
[volunteering@volunteering.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@volunteering.org.uk)  
Website:  
<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/>

For training:

**Sheffield Volunteer Centre**  
**Voluntary Action Sheffield**  
The Circle  
33 Rockingham Lane  
Sheffield  
S1 4FW  
Tel: 0114 253 6649  
Fax: 0114 253 6601  
Website: [www.vas.org.uk](http://www.vas.org.uk)

To share information and get support:

**Volunteer Managers Forum**  
**(which has quarterly meetings)**  
c/o Sheffield Volunteer Centre (as above)

**INFORMATION SHEETS** available from VAS:

Accessible Organisations  
Acquiring and Managing Premises  
Action Planning  
Business Planning  
Campaigning and Lobbying  
Charitable Incorporated Organisations  
Closing Down  
Community Interest Companies  
Constitutions  
Contracts and Procurement  
Data Protection  
Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures  
Due Diligence  
Employing a Worker  
Equality and Diversity  
Guarantee Companies  
Handling Redundancies  
Health and Safety  
Incorporated Charities  
Insuring your Organisation  
Involving Volunteers  
Legal Structures  
Management Committees  
Monitoring and Evaluation  
Parents and Carers at Work  
Quality Assurance  
Safeguarding Vulnerable People  
Sickness Absence Management  
Starting Up  
Trading and Fund-raising



The Circle  
33 Rockingham Lane  
Sheffield S1 4FW  
Tel: 0114 253 6600 Fax: 0114 253  
6601  
Email: [info@vas.org.uk](mailto:info@vas.org.uk)  
Website: [www.vas.org.uk](http://www.vas.org.uk)  
Registered charity no: 223007  
Company limited by guarantee no: 215695