

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS



2. Volunteer Recruitment – the process

Where do I start?

The starting point is to decide why you want volunteers and what is appropriate work for them to do. If you have paid staff, you should consult them to ensure there is good understanding of volunteering throughout the organisation. This also goes for people at board or management committee level. It is important that people at all levels of the organisation understand and are fully supportive of the involvement of volunteers,

Once you have consulted about volunteer development it can be useful to draw up a **volunteer policy** for the organisation including the basic principles behind your volunteer involvement and your practice guidelines for working with volunteers (for example the payment of expenses).

Developing role descriptions

Writing a role description allows you to work out exactly what role the volunteer will play in the organisation and what you need them to do. By looking at this you can make an assessment of what skills you need the volunteer to have. The phrase 'job description' should be avoided but the actual name – role/task description – voluntary work outline – is up to you.

Having a clear role description will help with recruitment. Advertising for a specific volunteer role is more likely to attract people if they can imagine doing it. A role description also lets potential volunteers decide whether or not the role is appropriate for them. You are more likely to keep someone if they are fully aware of the types of work they will be doing before they start.

A role description needn't be rigid. It may allow ways of including people who do not have all the skills you need. If there is money for training, someone with limited IT skills can learn and then help with computer work. Or perhaps the role can be split between several volunteers doing different tasks. If a volunteer needs a lot of support it might be possible to take on another volunteer to work with them, or to use their support worker if they have one, to help them settle in. However, be realistic, if there is no scope for flexibility it may be better to help the individual to find a more appropriate role in another organisation.

Things to think about when developing a role description:

- What tasks do you have that you need volunteers to do?
- How might these be combined to create a role?
- How much training could you give?
- How much support and supervision can you give?
- Are there any areas of role development?
- What skills would the volunteer need to have already?

Advertising the role

First decide who the role is likely to appeal to and what someone would get out of it. For example – could someone develop skills appropriate for a particular job? - would it be a good way of meeting new people? – would it interest someone with a particular hobby? Use this list to decide which groups it would be best to aim your advertising at. For instance if your volunteer role would give good experience in a social care setting it might interest social work students.

How to advertise

Look at different methods of advertising and decide which are most appropriate to you. Keep in mind why people might want to volunteer for you and what sort of groups they may come from. Methods include:

Word of mouth

Existing staff, clients, supporters or volunteers telling them about the organisation recruit most volunteers. Make sure everyone you know is aware that you are trying to recruit and what the opportunities are. However existing volunteers and staff will tend to recruit people similar to them, so this might limit the diversity of volunteers.

Printed information

Posters can spread your message to a wider audience, and leaflets or postcards are a handy and attractive way of providing information to potential recruits. Keep them simple, and show what sort of volunteering opportunities you are offering.

Places to distribute printed information:

- schools and colleges;
- libraries;
- town hall and other public buildings;
- GP and dental surgeries;
- sports and leisure centres;
- religious centres;
- shop windows;
- bars;
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Accessible design - it is good if your materials are well designed and eye catching but the most important thing is that people read them. All materials should be clearly readable by people with sight problems. A sans serif font such as arial is easier to read – the RNIB recommends 14 point black. Black text on a white or yellow background without columns or boxes is easier to read. Bullet points can be a clear and easily readable way to emphasise certain points.

Language – use clear and easily understandable English and avoid jargon. Images can back up important points and it may be worth having materials translated into community languages.

Arranging a talk or presentation

If there is a particular group of people who would be interested in volunteering for you, you could arrange a talk or presentation for them. Setting it up could take time – you need to persuade your host (e.g. school or an employer) that your information will be of real interest. You could think about doing talks for:

- youth groups;
- schools;
- ESOL classes;
- cultural groups;
- community centres;
- day centres;
- training and rehabilitation projects.

Tips for presentations

Be as well briefed as possible about the people you will be talking to and what is likely to appeal to them about volunteering.

Visual images such as photographs or a video can aid a presentation, but real live clients or volunteers are the most effective inspiration.

Bring printed information to support your talk, giving people the chance to go away and think before committing themselves. Be clear about how people can get involved or find out more if they are interested

Contact the Volunteer Centre

The Volunteer Centre keeps a database of voluntary opportunities that are brought to the attention of potential volunteers visiting the Centre. These opportunities are also uploaded to the national volunteering database www.do-it.org This means that people can search for opportunities by post code, area of interest and type of activity from their own computer, and enquire or apply on-line thus widening the potential market for volunteers. The Volunteer Centre Organiser (VCO) also advertises recently notified or urgent opportunities each month in the Hastings Observer and on HVA's own website www.hastingsvoluntaryaction.org/volunteering

To contact the VCO on 01424 446060/444010 or email rose@hvauk.org

Volunteers Week (www.volunteersweek.org.uk)

This and similar events are a great chance to recruit new volunteers. You might attract publicity with an exhibition stand in a shopping centre or by staging a publicity stunt.

Local media coverage

Events such as Volunteers Week provide an opportunity to get coverage, ranging from featured articles to brief news stories. Try to build a good relationship with the local newspaper and radio station, stressing the human interest of local people getting involved to help the community. You can also advertise for volunteers in the local press. As well as advertising in the Hastings Observer don't forget about some of the community newspapers such as 'The Warrior' produced by Gensing & St. Leonards Community Forum.

Writing an advert

Once you have a clear role that you are recruiting to you can start thinking about advertising for volunteers.

Keep it short – provide enough information to interest people but keep it short enough to hold their attention.

Think about it – work out why someone would want to volunteer for you and who is most likely to volunteer with you, and base your advert on that.

Wording an advert

The wording depends on who the ad is aimed at and where it will appear, but these tips should help:

- **A statement of need** makes potential volunteers stop and think ‘somebody should do something about that’ – it could be them. The statement of need should not cover why your organisation needs volunteers, that will be covered later on, but should explain why the community, or world at large, needs people to do the type of voluntary work that you are advertising. For example, for a telephone helpline volunteer you might start with; *‘Sometimes people have worries and fears that they are too scared or embarrassed to discuss with someone they know’*. Or for a mental health befriending scheme volunteer, you could say *‘Some people find it too frightening to step outside their own front door for weeks on end.’*
- **Tell them how they can meet this need.** Describe the activities volunteers carry out in your organisation.
- **Avoid jargon** – terms like ‘advocate’, ‘support worker’ and ‘befriender’ can be confusing. Even ‘admin support’ can encompass a lot of different roles. People are more likely to take the next step towards volunteering for you if they can picture themselves in the role, and to do that they need enough information to understand exactly what the role entails.
- **Dispel fears** – anticipate anxieties the potential volunteer may have. For example, you could include information about who can volunteer (*‘No previous experience necessary just and interest/enthusiasm for ...’*), or a reassurance that they will be supported in the role (*‘Full training given and volunteers will attend monthly supervision sessions’*) or a commitment to inclusive working (*‘We welcome applications from all sections of the community and are keen to diversify our volunteer workforce’*).
- **Describe how they will benefit** - everyone volunteers for a reason. Your first step when devising a recruitment strategy for the role should have been to identify why someone might want to do it (meet people, training experience leading to a particular career, etc.). Sell the role by including these points in your advert.

Dealing with enquiries

Most potential volunteers make initial contact via the phone so it is important their enquiry is dealt with in a way that will make them want to find out more.

Make sure that whoever is answering the phone knows what to do and who to pass the call on to.

Do...

...**include instructions** for people interested in volunteering in **your answer phone message** so they know they have got through to the right place. Many volunteers call out of office hours and need to feel welcome and included.

...**check callers know essential facts** i.e. if you only need volunteers on a Wednesday there is no point in them continuing the application process if they work all day Wednesday.

Don't...

...**ask people to call back** – the chances are they just won't. If no-one is available immediately it is better to take a contact number and get back to the caller. If you say that you are going to call back, make sure that you do.

...**ask potential volunteers too many questions** over the phone. They will not be expecting to be interviewed.

Information packs

It is a good idea to have an information pack available for people who are interested in volunteering. It could contain information about the organisation, the volunteer role and practical details about expenses and training.

Avoid putting in formal policies – it is better to deal with these in the volunteer's induction. The information pack is an extension of your recruitment materials. You need to provide information for the potential volunteer to decide if your organisation is right for them but at this stage you are still 'selling' volunteering within your organisation.

It can be helpful to invite the potential volunteer to come and visit your organisation before deciding whether they want to apply to volunteer. Not everybody wants to do this but for many people an informal visit is a good first step. For many people who have never volunteered, applying to an organisation is a nerve wracking experience and they do not know what to expect. In addition if it becomes apparent during the informal visit that the volunteer role would not suit the particular person or vice versa, then it may be better to end the process there, rather than getting the person to go through the whole application process and then withdrawing or not being taken on.

The Application Process

This will depend on your organisation and the work that volunteers undertake within it. Some organisations have more people wanting to volunteer than they can take on and so have to select. Others need to screen volunteers carefully because of the work they are doing, while some will take on anyone who is interested.

Do...

...**develop a system** that suits your needs but does not put off potential volunteers or put unnecessary barriers in their way.

Don't...

... **just adapt application forms and interview techniques from the way you recruit paid staff**. This is rarely appropriate and an overly formal process discourages a lot of people who otherwise might be interested in volunteering.

Application forms

Forms can be off-putting for people. Application forms for volunteers – if used at all – should be very minimal so as not to put off potential volunteers by too many complex questions and to avoid excluding volunteers whose level of literacy or English may not be very high, but who have lots of other skills and experience. Examples of Volunteer Application Forms are appended.

For most organisations it should be possible to get the information they need when they meet the volunteer in person, rather than getting them to fill out a form themselves. People are much more forthcoming about why they want to volunteer and their skills and experience when chatting than putting it on paper.

Information for equal opportunities monitoring should be asked for on a separate form kept apart from other personal details, and you should explain why you need this information.

Volunteer Interviews

An interview with a volunteer is a **two-way process**, an opportunity for both parties to find out more. If it is a selection process and not all volunteers will be taken on make sure the person knows this at the outset.

Make it friendly – the word 'interview' can be very off-putting. Asking potential volunteers to come in for a chat makes the process sound much friendlier, although let them know what this means so they don't worry what a 'chat' might mean. Stress that this is a chance for them to interview you and find out if the organisation is right for them. Pay attention to seating arrangements to help put people at their ease – sitting behind a desk can come across as intimidating.

Set aside enough time without interruptions – if possible make sure you have a quiet space where you will not be disturbed, and enough time to exchange all the information you both need without rushing.

Be prepared – make sure you have everything you need for the interview including any forms, reports or policies you may want to give the potential volunteer.

Interview structure

How the interview itself unfolds will depend greatly on the particular role. If the volunteer is going to be working with vulnerable clients, the information and feel you get from the volunteer is much more important. In any case although the interview is informal it should have some structure. There will be some information you need to tell the volunteer, and some you need from them.

Start – explain the purpose of the interview to put the person at their ease. Let them know that anything they say will remain confidential – and explain the boundaries of the confidentiality. You can also start with any form filling that needs to be done, checking personal details and so on. Have a list of the information you want to give the volunteer, and what you want from them, but don't let it stifle the natural conversation.

Tell them about your organisation – and answer any questions so they can decide if they are interested in you. This may include details of:

- the aims of the organisation and how volunteers fit into this;
- the task description for the volunteer role;
- the client group;
- training & support offered to volunteers;
- your expectations of volunteers (including a brief outline of the policies that affect volunteers, e.g. equal opportunities, health and safety and other volunteer conduct);
- time commitment (how often you expect them to volunteer over what time period);
- resources available to volunteers.

Ask them about themselves – and what they have to offer so you can decide if you are interested in taking them on. You may want them to tell you:

- what made them want to volunteer with you;
- what they hope to gain from volunteering;
- what they know about your client group;
- relevant skills and experience;
- time availability;
- what support needs they have (e.g. induction loop, reimbursement of care costs, support from outside the organisation – do not make assumptions about what you think they might – or might not – need);
- names of potential referees

Ask open questions, that is ones that demand more than a yes or no answer, and give as much space as you can for volunteers to ask their own.

Accuracy and confidentiality – if recording information from the interview, record only factual information and not opinion. Assure the interviewee that what they say will remain confidential.

Think about the task description – the interview allows you to see whether or not it can be adapted to better suit the individual.

What the interview is aiming for

At the end of the interview you can discuss with the potential volunteer whether or not you are happy for them to volunteer with you. If you need time to decide whether or not the person is suitable or if, for example, there is scope to change the role to suit them, then give a clear deadline for your decision.

If you are taking the volunteer on, make sure they leave knowing exactly what the next step will be – when you will contact them or when they are expected to start.

When in doubt – if you are not certain that the volunteer has the skills and experience to carry out the role, you need to explain this, making it clear that your assessment is based on the requirements of the role description and person specification.

Occasionally you may feel that you want to **talk to a colleague** or trustee, or that it may be useful for the **volunteer to meet an established volunteer** before proceeding. A **trial period** may also be helpful for both parties – it gives volunteers a taste of the role and you a chance to see how they fit in. This is perfectly reasonable but it is important to be open with potential volunteers about what you are suggesting and why.

References

What are references for?

References are comments from people who know the person, in either a work or social context. They can range from a basic check that the person is who they say they are, through to a detailed recommendation of their suitability for the role.

Do we need references?

This depends on the type of work that the volunteer will be doing and the risks involved. **Legally** there is no requirement routinely to ask for references. However, organisations do have a **legal duty of care** towards their clients and it could be argued that they had failed in this duty if they did not take up references and the client was harmed. Therefore most organisations where volunteers work directly do ask for references.

Who should the references be from?

Decide exactly what kind of information you need from the reference and who would be best placed to provide it. (However without thought references can act as another barrier to groups who already find themselves excluded. Some people might have genuine difficulty in finding referees – for example, asylum seekers.)

An employer – fine if the person has been in recent employment, but a huge barrier to anyone who has not been recently employed. It could discriminate against many groups and mean that you miss out on a lot of potential volunteers.

Other professionals – if it is important to have a referee who knows the volunteer in a professional capacity, then social workers, day centre staff and religious leaders may be able to provide you with the sort of information you need.

Personal friend – sometimes a character reference from someone who knows the volunteer in a personal capacity is more suitable, perhaps excluding a close family member or someone under the age of 18. Again this depends on why the reference is needed and the role the volunteer is going to do.

How long do they need to have known the potential volunteer?

Asking for a referee who has known the volunteer for a long time may be creating barriers. Think about the length of time that you would personally would need to know someone before providing them with a reference, the volunteer role and the type of information you are hoping to get from the referee. The more flexible you can be, the more people will be able to volunteer for you.

Explain about references

Often the first time volunteers find out they need references is from an application form. This can put people off from applying at all. Explain why you need them and who would be a suitable referee. If they are having problems, see if you can come up with any suggestions. If it is not possible to talk to the volunteer, make sure the application form explains why references are needed and who would be a suitable referee.

Remind volunteers that they should check their proposed referee is willing to give a reference.

Should I wait for references before a volunteer can start?

Reasons to wait:

- It can be difficult and embarrassing to terminate a volunteer's involvement if the reference raises concerns.
- If references are required to check a volunteer's suitability to work with clients it may be risky to let them start before receiving the information.

Reasons not to wait:

- Getting volunteers involved early in some way keeps up their enthusiasm. Of course you might not be able to – it depends on the role. One way might be to get the volunteer doing something else for the organisation in the meantime. One of the main ways volunteers are lost is if they have to wait too long before they can start doing something.

What if a reference does cause concern?

You need to ask the referee's permission before discussing it with the volunteer. Consider how it relates to your original impression of the volunteer and the role, support, training and supervision available.

What if the person cannot provide a reference?

This can happen, for example in the case of an asylum seeker who has not been in the country very long. Assess the risks involved and decide if there is a safe way of involving the person. Where a CRB check cannot be obtained, or will mean little in the context of a person having only been in the UK four months as an asylum seeker, you may be able to adapt some of your procedures, for example involving them only in group activities for the first few months while you get to know them better. Make sure you explain to the volunteer why you are doing this so they do not feel singled out.

What about screening and Criminal Record Bureau checks?

Organisations that fall under the remit of the National Care Standards Act have a legal responsibility to do a CRB check on potential volunteers. Other organisations have a responsibility under their duty of care to protect others from harm. Increasingly, and particularly for organisations working with vulnerable people this means doing a CRB check.

Appendices – Application Forms

- i) Hospital Radio Hastings – designed to obtain very specific information required to assess suitability for the role – i.e.. times available in pm.

Appendix i)

HOSPITAL RADIO HASTINGS

The Conquest Hospital, The Ridge, Hastings, East Sussex TN37 7RD
01424 755 255 ext.8309 Charity no 278355

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Thank you for showing an interest in our organisation. Please fill in this form and return it to the Chairman at the address above.

NAME TEL NO.....

ADDRESS

.....
.....
.....

AGE GROUP 16-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61+

DO YOU HAVE YOUR OWN TRANSPORT?

WHAT IS YOUR REASON FOR WANTING TO JOIN HOSPITAL RADIO?.....
.....

WE BROADCAST EVERY EVENING FROM 7.00 pm to 10.00pm
WHICH TIMES ARE YOU AVAILABLE?
.....
.....

HAVE YOU GAINED ANY PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN RADIO BROADCASTING?
.....
.....

WE NEED HELP IN THE LIBRARY, REQUEST COLLECTING, OPERATING THE EQUIPMENT, PRESENTING PROGRAMMES
NEW MEMBERS ARE NORMALLY ASKED TO SERVE SIX MONTHS PROBATIONARY PERIOD BEFORE PRESENTING PROGRAMMES

PLEASE GIVE THE NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF TWO REFEREES THAT WE MAY CONTACT

1 st Referee	2 nd Referee
.....
.....
.....

SIGNED..... DATE