

INVOLVING VOLUNTEERS



Many groups rely on volunteers to help them operate. This fact sheet is designed to help you to successfully involve volunteers in your organisation.

Before taking on volunteers

It is worth thinking about why you want volunteers and what you can offer them. To implement successful volunteering in your organisation it is essential to get agreement from all staff about their involvement. Sometimes paid staff can feel threatened by the fear volunteers will take over or they are any easy option for dealing with a large workload. Make sure there is a genuine role for volunteers; volunteers should not be substitutes for paid workers. Volunteers should not be recruited if there is no suitable role for them.

Having volunteers in your organisation in a constructive and positive way is not 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 for expenses.

Recruitment

There are various methods of recruiting volunteers. The most successful technique is often through word of mouth, so it is important that as many people know about your need for volunteers, what they are needed for and the benefits of volunteering in your organisation. It is important to emphasize what the volunteers will get out of their commitment in your recruitment publicity materials.

Ensure that you actively diversify the pool of volunteers; this will demonstrate your organisation's commitment to equal opportunities and help to increase the number of people coming forward for volunteering.

Many organisations will send out an application form to an interested individual; it may be better if possible to invite them in see your organisation and meet other staff before they formally apply. This will save time in the long run and help you to capture the right volunteers for your organisation.

Things to consider

- **Volunteer Policy** – a useful document to record the thinking that has gone on in preparation for working with volunteers. The policy may cover equal opportunities, recruitment, training and support.
- **Volunteer Agreement** – a document covering the rights and responsibilities of both volunteers and employers, such as time commitment, behaviour and support. Legally, volunteers are not employees, so the agreement is not a contract, but should be useful in clarifying the expectations of volunteers and the organisation.
- **Time** - for recruitment and selection, training new volunteers, satisfying the ongoing support needs of volunteers.
- **Resources** – including office space, access to computers, telephone, etc.
- **Finances** – reimbursement of expenses, cost of criminal records checks, training and any extra insurance cover that might be required.

Selection

Consider what methods you will use to decide on whether a potential volunteer is suitable for your organisation. Some organisations have an initial interest information pack and application form, which is then followed by an interview, chat or induction, depending on how formal the recruitment process is. Organisations can also take up references. Those working with vulnerable people will need to carry out a Criminal Record Check.



Some people can be put off volunteering if there are too many obstacles to overcome before they start. It is advisable that if there is to be more responsibility given to a volunteer then a more rigorous selection process should be carried out. You can also choose the option of taking on a volunteer for a trial period.

If at any stage during the selection process you feel that a volunteer is not suitable, it is important to refer them on to sources of other volunteering opportunities, as they may be suitable for other organisations. SUSTAiN's Volunteering Brokerage Service can help with this.

Induction

New volunteers should have an induction as a way of introducing them to your organisation. It is a formal opportunity to ask questions and to clarify their role, and can be on a one-to-one or group basis. An induction should include an overview of the work of the organisation, its aims and objectives, introduction to staff and other volunteers. You should identify who is going to spend time with a new volunteer and what they need to cover for the volunteer to feel welcomed and fully informed.

It is a good idea to put together an Induction Pack so that new volunteers have all the information they need – such as copies of your volunteer agreement, policies, expenses procedure, contact details etc.

Further help and support:

SUSTAiN Volunteer Brokerage

The Priory, Church Hill Road, Solihull B91 3LF

0121 711 3148

www.solihull-sustain.org.uk

Volunteer Management Forum Monthly meetings open to all individuals and organisations that rely on volunteers and want to do the best to support them.

C/o SUSTAiN (as above)

Volunteering England www.volunteering.org.uk