

Volunteer Recruitment

To successfully recruit and keep the right volunteers for you in the right roles for them requires a bit of planning and preparation. The aim of this Good Practice Guide is to assist you through the process.

First Things First

Consult with colleagues

If you have paid staff consult with them to ensure there is a good understanding of volunteering throughout the organisation. Everyone in the organisation needs to understand and fully support the organisation in working with volunteers.

Write a volunteer policy

Your volunteer policy should include the basic principles behind your volunteer involvement and guidelines for working with volunteers, such as your volunteer recruitment procedure, insurance information, the payment of expenses, health and safety information, and arrangements for training, support and supervision.

Write a problem solving procedure

An established problem solving procedure is invaluable when things go wrong, so everyone is clear how disciplinary matters and grievances will be addressed, investigated and resolved.

Write a volunteer agreement

Volunteer agreements can be used to set out both an organisation's commitment to its volunteers, and what it hopes for from its volunteers. Such agreements act as a reference point for the volunteers, and a reminder to the organisation that it should meet the standards of good practice that it has set itself. Take care to avoid any reference to a 'contract', which might create expectations of contractual commitments, eg paid employment. It is advisable to insert a phrase into the agreement to make this absolutely clear, such as:

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

Support for volunteers

All volunteers need support, depending on the nature of their work:

- Supervision – regular times to talk and plan and knowing who to report to.
- Role description – outlining their duties as a volunteer (see below).
- Training/induction – everyone requires sufficient instruction to do their work well.

- Recognition – meaningful ways to acknowledge the contribution volunteers make.

Role descriptions

Writing a role description requires you to work out exactly what role/s volunteers will play in your organisation and will help you make a clear assessment of the tasks involved. A role description also allows potential volunteers to judge whether the role is appropriate to them. Role descriptions are not to be confused with job descriptions written with an ideal candidate in mind, and the phrase job description with its connotations of paid employment should be avoided. You simply need to describe the role and specify any essential skills required.

Attracting Volunteers

Writing an effective advertisement

No matter what medium you choose for advertising your volunteer vacancy you will need to write an effective advert; clear and concise and neither too long nor too short. Encourage potential volunteers to visualise themselves in the role by specifying exactly what's involved. Help them see the good they could do; how much they might enjoy themselves and what benefits might accrue from volunteering with you.

Include the following:

- Who? What skills, attitudes, experience or knowledge are required of the volunteer?
- What? What will the volunteer actually be doing?
- Why? What is the purpose of the task? (eg how their voluntary work will benefit the cause)
- When? When will the voluntary work take place? How many hours? How often?
- Where? Where will the volunteer be located?

Also consider:

- Title – a name that describes the work and gives it value
- Benefits – training, learning new skills, sharing old skills, experience for the CV, the chance to make a difference, opportunities to meet people, structure to the week, feeling part of a team, building confidence and self-esteem
- Dispel fears – anticipate anxieties by specifying the time commitment (that you are not going to take over their lives), stating that expenses will be refunded so they know they won't be out of pocket, saying that no previous experience is necessary (if it isn't), assuring that volunteers will be fully trained and supported, emphasising that applications from all sections of the community will be welcomed and that your premises are fully accessible (if they are)

- Accessibility – use clear, eye catching design, a big enough font and understandable language, avoiding jargon (it really puts people off)

Eight ways to attract volunteers

Here are eight ways of attracting volunteers. Consider who you want to attract, this may help you decide where to place your promotional material. You might want to target specific groups to diversify your volunteer base.

1. Word of mouth – still the most effective way of recruiting volunteers. Ask each of your members to encourage one new person to volunteer with your organisation (some groups incentivise this with a small gift). This is good for building numbers but not always for diversifying your membership, as people tend to recruit people like themselves
2. Volunteer Centre – 01425 482773 or vol.bureau@cfnf.org.uk – ask us to advertise your volunteering role/s on the do-it website, through our Volunteering Matters newsletter, through one-to-one interviews with volunteers and through our outreach work and media contacts
3. Local press – submit an eye-catching press release, with photos. Parish Magazines? Free papers? *See our Writing a Media Release information sheet*
4. Posters/flyers – displayed in your local community. Which shops have notice boards? Where are people stuck in queues? Where are your community notice boards? Library? Doctor's surgery? Supermarket?
5. Local radio stations – ask to be interviewed or make a pre-recorded statement (or ask an enthusiastic volunteer to)
6. Local organisations – who works with people who may be looking for new activities/experiences? Consider faith groups, parents of children who have just started school, organisations who work with people living with health conditions or disabilities, people seeking work and needing to widen their work experience, job clubs, clubs for recently divorced people, bereavement support organisations, organisations supporting ex-offenders, schools and colleges running the Duke of Edinburgh Award, universities and colleges needing work placements for health and social care or business studies students, university volunteering schemes
7. Talks – give a talk (formal or informal) to any of the above organisations ... or ask an enthusiastic volunteer to

8. Internet – use your website, if you have one, to advertise your volunteering roles and use social media – it's free! Use pictures wherever possible as they get a much bigger response. Facebook and Twitter are obvious platforms, but Streetlife is good for wide coverage and a real community feel: <https://www.streetlife.com>

The Recruitment Process

Recruiting for your organisation

Your recruitment process will depend on your organisation and the work your volunteers do. Some organisations have more people wanting to volunteer than they have space for, and so they need to select. Others need to screen potential volunteers carefully because of the sensitive nature of their work. Some will take anybody who is interested. You need to develop a system that suits your needs but doesn't put off potential volunteers or place unnecessary barriers in their way.

Application forms

If you use an application form keep it as simple as possible, capturing only the information you genuinely need. Be clear about why you are asking the questions you are asking and state how you will store the information provided (securely in compliance with data protection legislation) and what you will do with it. Some information will simply be contact details. More personal information (age, ethnicity, disability and employment status) will be for equal opportunities monitoring. Other details relating to skills, experience and interests will be used for matching the individual with the role. Where possible it is preferable to complete the form yourself, while chatting to the potential volunteer. This will make the process less formal and avoid excluding those with lower literacy levels.

Interviews

An interview with a potential volunteer is a two-way process, an opportunity for both parties to find out more and gauge the suitability of the role/person. The word interview can be off-putting. Asking a potential volunteer to come in for a chat sounds friendlier. Create a setting that will put people at their ease. Arrange the seating, for example, so you are not sitting behind a desk.

Selection

If you decide that an applicant is not suitable for your volunteering role then you should inform them at the earliest opportunity and give the candidate a clear reason for your decision. You can refer them to our Volunteer Centre so that we can help them find a suitable role.

References

It is good practice to take up two references for each volunteer. Ask the referee about the potential volunteer's honesty, reliability and suitability for the role, including attributes key to a particular role, eg ability to maintain confidentiality. The referee does not need to be a former employer but rather someone who knows them well enough to vouch for their suitability and good character.

Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check

A DBS check may be required for those volunteering roles that involve regular contact with children or vulnerable adults and are designated as 'regulated activities'. You can only take up DBS checks on eligible roles. It is illegal to make a DBS check on a person where the role is not eligible. We can advise you on when a DBS check is required and which roles are eligible. You can also look online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

Or call the DBS helpline on 03000 200 190

See our fact sheet: Does My Volunteer Need a DBS Check?

Further Assistance

For further information, support or guidance on recruiting volunteers, please contact the Volunteer Centre at Community First New Forest. Contact details: Tel. 01425 482773, email vol.bureau@cfnf.org.uk

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Registered charity number 1052978

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