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Diversity - overview

From Barriers To Bridges - Involving a broader range of volunteers

(Updated version of a printed booklet called "From Barriers To Bridges")

Why don't more people volunteer?

What might put someone off from contacting an organisation or why do some people seem to lose interest after making an initial enquiry? If they do start volunteering, what makes them stop? And why do so many organisations work with volunteers from very narrow sections of society?

Often potential volunteers run into barriers which can relate to their perceptions of volunteering or can be caused by a lack of information. People might expect volunteering to be a time-consuming activity or worry that they lack the right experience. They might worry that they can't afford the travel costs or be concerned that volunteering could affect their entitlement to social security benefits. These are examples of perceived or practical barriers to volunteering.

If your organisation wants to attract and involve more volunteers from across the community, this leaflet/section will help you to spot potential barriers and find ways to work around them. Thinking about the benefits for your organisation will help you to plan for greater diversity. This leaflet/section also suggests how you can support volunteers once they are with you, as well as ways of recognising and rewarding their contribution to your organisation.

What kinds of barriers might stop people from volunteering?

Perceived barriers

Time commitment. Some people expect volunteering to take up large chunks of time each week or think that only retired people or part-time workers have time to volunteer.

- Your organisation could estimate the likely weekly commitment and include this in publicity materials used to recruit volunteers or let people know that they need only volunteer for an afternoon a week for example. However, you should be careful not to specify a minimum required time commitment as this could risk creating a contractual relationship.

- Organisations can think about designing different kinds of volunteer roles to suit different lifestyles. Depending on the tasks involved, you can also create taster days or one-off volunteering days to get people involved.

Volunteering not valued. Volunteering may be seen as a one-sided activity for do-gooders. Unpaid work is sometimes viewed as unskilled work or not worth doing if it isn't going to pay the bills.

- Volunteering is a mutually beneficial activity so organisations can emphasise the satisfaction or skills or new friends that a volunteer will gain. You could invite current volunteers to act as advocates at recruitment events or include stories about their experiences in your publicity materials.

Lack of skills. Volunteering can be a great way to learn new skills and build on existing ones, but potential volunteers might worry that they lack the necessary skills from the start.

- Organisations generally offer training to their volunteers, whether this is through a formal course or just explaining tasks on a one-to-one basis. You can reassure potential volunteers by giving a clear description of the tasks involved and by mentioning training opportunities in your recruitment materials. Training should however be related to the work the volunteers are doing, and should not be given as a perk.

Pigeon-holing of roles. People often expect to be offered traditional roles and can be put off by this.

- Do you automatically offer caring roles to women or practical roles to men without being aware of it? Also, avoid pigeon-holing by background, for example by always matching Asian volunteers to an Asian client group.
- Be ready to create new challenges in your volunteering and take the time to chat with new volunteers to find out what they are interested in. It's also good to be prepared to help a volunteer try out a few different roles if the first one doesn't suit them.

Over-formality. Potential volunteers can be discouraged by formal recruitment procedures such as completing a long registration form or attending an interview. These can be daunting for people with lower literacy levels or English language skills.

- Organisations sometimes forget to develop different recruitment procedures for volunteers and staff. If you do use registration forms, only request information which is necessary. For example, you might simply need to know that someone meets a minimum age limit for insurance purposes, rather than asking their exact date of birth.
- You might even decide not to use registration forms and note down the important details during an introductory chat with a new volunteer.

Practical barriers

Expenses. Research shows that people on a low income are less likely to volunteer. This may be because they can't afford to be left out of pocket.

If at all possible, all reasonable expenses should be reimbursed.

These include :

- travel to and from the place of volunteering
- travel undertaken as part of the voluntary work
- meals taken whilst volunteering
- special equipment such as safety boots
- cost of looking after children or other dependants (where feasible)
- postage and telephone costs (if working from home)

It is important to pay out-of-pocket expenses only, for which your volunteers should give you receipts and bus/train tickets. Giving your volunteers flat rate expenses (eg: giving volunteers a standard 2.50 for lunch) could be seen as income by the Job Centre and HM Revenue and Customs.

Remember that the cost of travelling and a meal eaten out is significant to someone on social security benefits or a low income. It is important to be flexible when paying expenses and try to pay them in cash on a frequent basis.

Childcare or other caring responsibilities. Having children or dependants should not be a barrier to volunteering.

- If at all possible, care expenses should be paid or facilities provided.
- If this isn't currently possible, think creatively about how to create other family-friendly opportunities. Your organisation might be able to cover part of the cost of care expenses and could build these costs into future budgets or funding bids. You could also offer volunteering opportunities with flexible hours or consider whether volunteering from home would work.

Transport. Inaccessibility of transport can be a major barrier for potential volunteers.

- People with disabilities or those living in rural areas can have particular difficulties in arranging and paying for transport to and from their voluntary activity.
- Wherever possible, your organisation should arrange transport for people who require it, or reimburse travel costs such as bus/train fares and taxi costs.
- Remember that people with disabilities may need extra notice about their volunteering as it can take them time to organise transport in advance.

Barriers affecting certain groups

Entitlement to benefits. People receiving benefits are often uncertain of the rules around volunteering. It's often important to reassure them that they can volunteer and help them to understand the relevant rules.

- Booklet WK1, [Financial help if you work or are looking for work](#) (available from Jobcentres) states that volunteering should not affect Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), Income Support, Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance. There are no restrictions on the amount of time people can volunteer.
- People receiving Jobseekers Allowance should be aware that they have to remain both available for, and actively seeking, work. This means that as an organisation you may

have to give your volunteers some flexibility to attend Jobcentre meetings or job interviews.

- The benefits rules also state that volunteers receiving any of the benefits mentioned above should tell their Jobcentre or social security office if they do any voluntary work. Your organisation could provide a standard letter for volunteers to use when informing the Jobcentre or social security office. A volunteer may need to give your organisations telephone number to the Jobcentre so that they are easily contactable for interviews.

People seeking asylum.

- Asylum seekers (people in the process of applying for refugee status) have been allowed to volunteer since April 2000. This includes while they are appealing against a decision to refuse them asylum. They are issued with document IS96, which states that they are not allowed to take up paid or unpaid work. The Home Office have confirmed that this restriction does not include volunteering.
- As asylum seekers are not allowed to engage in paid or unpaid work, volunteering can provide a good opportunity to integrate into the local community and improve their English language skills in particular.

Criminal records. Having a criminal record need not be a barrier to volunteering. Since one in five adult men have a criminal conviction, it is important not to automatically exclude this significant group of potential volunteers.

- Only in special cases, such as care of vulnerable clients or handling large sums of money, should relevant convictions be taken into account.
- Depending on the volunteer role, an organisation should screen its potential volunteers through a Criminal Records Bureau Check. The need to screen will depend entirely on what the volunteer is doing and the client group that they are working with.
- If checks are required, it is fairest to let people know this from the outset. You should briefly explain the process to a potential volunteer and make it clear that having a conviction does not mean that they are automatically unsuitable.
- It is also important to ensure that new volunteers are kept involved and informed while the check is being processed. If it isn't appropriate to let them meet your client group, you might be able to involve them in training courses or other activities.

Disabled people. Twenty percent of the UK's population are registered as disabled, but only 6% of volunteers have disabilities.

- Potential disabled volunteers are often put off volunteering at an early stage by difficulties with access or transport. Wherever possible, organisations should reimburse their volunteers expenses and look into buying any specialist equipment required.
- Organisations should always be open to adapting tasks for their volunteers, and this might be particularly important when working with disabled people. It may be helpful to give a volunteer more breaks, or to look at dividing tasks so that different parts are completed by different people.
- The most important thing to take on board is to treat all volunteers as individuals. Don't second guess a volunteer's needs talk to them about any support they may need to enable them to volunteer.

Why involve a broader range of volunteers?

Although the answer may seem straightforward, there are many advantages to involving a diverse range of volunteers. Considering more of the benefits might help your organisation to identify some of its hidden barriers.

Firstly, organisations can always benefit from fresh approaches, so involving people with a broader range of backgrounds and experiences can help you to plan new projects and reinvigorate long-running ones.

Secondly, incorporating a wider range of ideas might help your organisation to improve its service and work more efficiently to fulfil its aims, whether these are fundraising, tree-planting or counselling.

Thirdly, reflecting the local community can boost an organisations credibility and improve its ability to focus on local needs. This could help you to develop new ideas or to meet specific funding criteria.

Fourthly, volunteering should offer everyone a fair chance to contribute and avoid excluding people through labelling, for example a client or a service user. Volunteering is mutually beneficial for both sides, so anyone should be able to participate as a volunteer.

Fifthly, as an organisation becomes more representative of the community it works in, the more welcoming it becomes. You can benefit from a snowball effect as your organisation diversifies and is accessible to new clients, customers and staff and a greater pool of potential volunteers.

Recruitment: how to promote volunteering to a more diverse range of people

Where to promote volunteering

If you produce leaflets, posters or adverts to recruit volunteers, using these in a wide range of local settings will help your organisation to reach a broader audience.

You might already have advertised in lots of public and community organisations, but there may be a few in this list which you haven't tried:

(Where the words are hyperlinked, clicking on the link will open a national directory of such services or organisations. These are external websites.)

- [Volunteer Centres](#), [Councils for Voluntary Service](#) (CVSs) or other local voluntary sector bodies.
- Places of worship, e.g. mosques, churches, temples, synagogues
- Meeting/leisure places, parks, clubs, cafes, pubs
- Sports centres and fitness groups
- Shopping centres, markets, supermarkets and shops
- [Jobcentres](#), [Disability Benefit Centres](#), [Local Authority or Council offices](#)
- Community centres running key skills or English classes
- [Health centres](#), e.g. doctors surgeries or hospital waiting rooms

- Nurseries, schools or [adult education colleges](#)
- [Universities](#), student unions and freshers fayres
- Information centres, e.g. [law centres](#) or [Citizens Advice Bureaux](#)
- Public libraries
- Hostels, housing providers or [housing associations'](#) newsletters
- Local facilities, e.g. laundrettes and [post offices](#)
- Weekly groups, such as women's groups or toddler groups
- Local and free newspapers (through adverts or a weekly column)
- Community and hospital radio stations
- Seasonal and community events, such as fairs or carboot sales

You can search www.yell.com to find local amenities and organisations based in your area.

Who to reach or target

Some organisations choose to target specific groups of people in publicity materials by including wording such as we particularly welcome enquiries from disabled people. Alternatively, consider using a broad statement such as, We welcome enquiries across the local community, regardless of background or experience.

You could try working in partnership with a local organisation which offers support to a specific group, examples could include schemes to help ex-offenders re-integrate into the local community, or programmes to help people with learning disabilities find a route into employment. Developing a partnership can bring fresh approaches and offer a further support network to new volunteers.

If you want to work more closely with faith-based or ethnic minority groups in your area, it may be helpful to meet representatives of community groups which exist already and see how you can link into existing initiatives. Taking the time to attend sports/music events or drop-in centres means you can chat to members of the community and learn about the issues they face. Another good tip could be to forge links with a particular sub-group within the community. If you can engage enthusiastic sixth-form or college students in a project, they may gradually get other family members interested in volunteering. Offering job references or help with CVs and university applications can be another way of supporting volunteers, and may be particularly welcome in communities where English is not spoken as a first language.

If you are organising a recruitment event, you should think about arranging special equipment or facilities for any people who might require it. At the end of this leaflet/section you can find more information on how to meet support and language needs.

How to advertise

You may want to include specific messages in your volunteer recruitment materials.

If your organisation is able to pay volunteers expenses, it is a good idea to mention it in your publicity materials. Promoting your accessibility or family friendly volunteering opportunities will also neutralise potential barriers from the start.

If you have space, mention the tasks which the volunteer will be engaged in so that people can see how they might fit in to your organisation. You could also emphasise some of the benefits

of volunteering and tailor this to a particular group, for example student volunteers might be particularly keen to enhance their CVs and improve their career prospects.

Consider avoiding certain wording in your campaigns, as some potential volunteers might find these phrases off-putting or misleading. A few suggestions:

- Some refugee communities may see the term volunteering as having military connotations, so other terms such as help or community involvement could be used for this audience.
- Some people might find the idea of an interview too formal, so try calling it an informal chat instead of interview to make introductory meetings sound more welcoming.
- Inviting your volunteers to preparation or social evenings might sound more attractive than training.
- It is good to avoid using the employment model so try asking about experience of, rather than listing the skills or expertise required.

Using word of mouth recruitment and volunteer advocates

Word of mouth can be a very effective publicity tool. Volunteers who feel good about giving their time to your organisation are likely to tell their friends. But, be careful not to rely too heavily on this method if you are aiming to widen diversity within your organisation, since it can lead to recruiting from the same groups of people.

Involving current volunteers is a good way of combining the advantages of word of mouth recruitment with other more targeted methods. You could invite volunteer advocates to speak at a recruitment day, to help run an information stall or to help you develop publicity materials.

Giving an inclusive image of volunteering

Preconceptions about who volunteers can sometimes be a barrier to people coming forward and offering their time. Inviting volunteer advocates to recruitment events could be a very direct way of showing how inclusive your organisation is. You could also consider using photographs in your publicity materials. If you use photographs in your publicity materials try to ensure that the images show a diverse range of people and look natural. You can visit Volunteering Englands online imagebank for ideas and also purchase photos at a low cost.

If you want to use photos of your volunteers, (either showing volunteers at work or at a celebratory event), it is important to get written permission before using the image. Remember that some volunteers may not want to publicise their activities, and some might not have informed the Jobcentre about their voluntary work. It is good practice to use a photo release form to obtain written permission from your volunteer.

Using forms as part of your recruitment process

Application forms can be off-putting for many people. A study by the Institute for Volunteering Research describes lengthy application forms as a barrier to people with sight problems, English as a second language, poor literacy skills, or learning disabilities (Volunteering for All?, IVR, 2004).

Research also suggests that many volunteers do not like what they see as bureaucracy and form filling.

Ask yourself whether you need an application form, or whether you could simply ask the volunteer in for an informal interview and get the same information face to face.

If you do use application/registration forms, make sure they have a simple layout and consider using tick boxes to reduce the amount of writing necessary.

Try to only ask questions which are relevant to the volunteer role and which will help you to decide whether the person would be able to perform the tasks. Where possible, avoid adapting forms which you use for staff recruitment.

Include a section on additional support needs and on disclosure of disability. Remember that some disabilities like epilepsy are hidden so you should never make assumptions about your volunteers.

Make it clear that you can assist in filling the form in. You may consider holding a regular drop-in session for people to fill in forms in your office so that staff or current volunteers can assist them.

Monitoring the diversity of your organisation

Asking staff to complete Equal Opportunities Monitoring Forms is a statutory requirement for public sector bodies, but voluntary sector organisations could consider using monitoring forms with staff and volunteers. Monitoring can be a good way to see how inclusive your organisation is. It can also help you to evaluate the results of recruitment campaigns by showing you which sections of the community respond to your publicity.

If your organisation decides to use monitoring forms, you should clearly explain why you are collecting the information. Reassure people that it will be anonymous and confidential and that they are under no obligation to complete the form.

Signposting for volunteers

It can be very hard to turn a volunteer away, but you should be prepared for this if you and the volunteer have discussed and tried out different roles without success, or if the potential volunteer has a criminal conviction which means they can't work with your clients. Remember that if they don't match the volunteer opportunities that you have, then neither the volunteer nor your organisation will benefit. If you can't offer a suitable opportunity to a willing volunteer, try to signpost them on to another organisation who may welcome their support [Volunteer Centres](#) can be particularly helpful.

Tips for keeping your volunteers

Establish clear and accessible volunteer policies

It is very useful to have firm volunteer policies in place (though this may not be appropriate for all organisations). Policies enable both volunteers and others in the organisation to feel secure

in their work as well as providing a framework for the relationship between volunteers and the organisation.

A volunteer policy should include both an equal opportunities policy and procedures for dealing with problems and will underline your organisations commitment to treating everyone fairly and consistently. Having a clear policy means your volunteers have a standard by which they can expect to be treated, and a mechanism for addressing problems and taking up complaints. Including a summary of your expenses procedure, insurance cover and volunteer support mechanisms, is helpful so that volunteers have something to refer back to whenever they want.

You should ensure that your volunteer policies are clearly written and presented, in the same way as your recruitment materials. Volunteering England produce a [guide to writing volunteering policies](#). Further sample policies can be obtained by contacting the Volunteering Englands information team.

Induction and training

All volunteers should be given an induction into the organisation and the area of work they will be undertaking. You should also take time to talk new volunteers through your health and safety, equal opportunities and other policies and procedures, as you would with paid staff.

Depending on the volunteer role, your organisation might organise group training sessions or you might explain tasks on a one-to-one basis. Remember to design your training sessions from the volunteers point of view and ask for feedback.

When explaining new tasks to a volunteer, it is good to break them down into smaller parts and give both verbal and written instructions. Some volunteers may like to bring an attendant or carer or interpreter to training sessions. When planning training sessions, or [icebreakers](#), be careful to avoid physical contact or language which could seem inappropriate for people from certain cultures.

Support and supervision

Remember that support and training should be given on a regular basis, so that volunteers can discuss their needs and concerns and receive feedback on their work.

Introducing a mentoring or buddying scheme can be a good way of offering extra support. Buddying schemes can help new volunteers to integrate more quickly, while also underlining your appreciation of more experienced volunteers who can share the knowledge they have gained about your organisation. Paid staff might also enjoy buddying and can show their commitment to the volunteering programme.

Recognition and participation

Volunteers will stay and contribute to your organisation if theyre treated well. You can personally and privately recognise the value of your volunteers by:

- inviting volunteers to take part in the daily life of the organisation at staff meetings and social events
- organising a thank you event where your volunteers contribution can be celebrated. Lots of organisations host ceremonies and give out certificates. [Volunteers Week](#) (1-7 June each year) is an excellent opportunity to organise something special.
- inviting your volunteers to give input when staff or volunteer policies are being developed. Involving volunteers throughout the process can also help you to create policies which are accessible to a wider audience.
- including your volunteering programme in your organisations annual review and other reports. Focusing on the time, commitment and skills of your volunteers and thinking about what your staff and clients also gain will help you to reflect the diversity of your volunteer programme.

Meeting individual needs

Asking your volunteers if they require any extra support or equipment, and having the knowledge to anticipate volunteers needs is an important part of volunteer recruitment and retention. Here are some tips on what to consider and who to ask for advice:

Ideas for adapting volunteer roles

- Volunteers with disabilities or on medication which makes them tired may need longer or more regular breaks.
- Some ex-offenders may find it difficult to take on a regular volunteering commitment at first as they may not want the routine or associate it with prison community service schemes.
- Older volunteers, who have been with your organisation for a long time, may find it becomes difficult to perform some part of their role and worry about mentioning this to you. Adapting their tasks, or offering them a less physically demanding role such as buddying other volunteers, can be a good solution.

Plain English and website accessibility

- Remember the importance of speaking and writing in a clear and simple way. Make sure that volunteer agreements and policies are not too wordy or legalistic. [The Plain English Campaign](#) has some good tips.
- Websites should be developed for ease of use and readability. Avoid using strange fonts or bright background colours. Intersperse pictures and text and make sure that links are easy to find. Remember that some people can find it difficult to use a mouse or need specialist equipment to use a computer. If you can, consult people with disabilities about the design of your website. You can get more information on web accessibility from the [RNIB](#) or the [Disability Rights Commission](#).

Extra office equipment

- Textphones or minicomms allow hearing impaired people to communicate over the telephone using a keyboard and visual display.
- Computer screen magnifiers can be attached to the monitor. They reduce glare and enlarge text and pictures on the screen.

- Large button telephones are helpful for visually impaired people or those with dexterity difficulties.
- Computer keyguards help people who have dexterity problems with typing.
- If you need any specialist computer equipment for volunteers with disabilities, [AbilityNet](#) may be able to help you.
- Remember that you may also need to move furniture around to improve wheelchair accessibility or fit other equipment such as a handrail or raised toilet seat. [The Centre for Accessible Environments](#) can advise you.

Communication support

- You can book a communication support worker through a specialist organisation such as [CACDP](#), [RNID](#) or the [British Deaf Association](#). Different kinds of communication support include induction loops, British Sign Language interpreters, lipspeakers and palantypists for speech to text reporting.

Special formats

- There are a variety of formats for visually-impaired people, including Braille, large print or audio tape/disc. You could have some materials readily available, such as recruitment materials, and have others specially prepared according to individual volunteers needs. RNIBs [See it Right](#) pack explains more about these formats. You can get transcription agency to prepare these resources for you. Prices vary according to the document length and the format required, so you may need to shop around. One good transcription agency is [Pia](#).

Translation into other languages

- Consider printing some of your publicity materials in other languages to attract people who speak English as a foreign language. Current volunteers who speak other languages might be able to help with translating signage or interpreting for recruitment events. However, be careful not to give a misleading impression if you aren't able to offer on-going support in other languages.
- You might find Volunteer Centre Sheffield's [Translated Volunteering Information](#) helpful. Generic letters and information sheets related to volunteering for refugees and asylum seekers are available on their website in English, Amharic, Arabic, Farsi, French, Kurdish (Sorani), Somali, Tigrinya, and Urdu.

Cultural awareness

- When working with people of different backgrounds and faiths, it is very useful to be aware of when cultural and religious events take place. You can anticipate when volunteers might need to alter shifts, you might want to avoid planning recruitment or training events on these dates and it can be an interesting point of conversation with your volunteers.
- The [count-me-in calendar](#) is a useful list of key dates and celebrations. The [Interfaith calendar](#) might also come in handy.
- Some important religious dates are closely linked to the lunar cycle, so remember that the timing of some celebrations may be established at very short notice.

Last Updated May 2009

Our thanks to Volunteering England, author of this information sheet

