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What will volunteers do?

Developing opportunities

Understanding what motivates people to do things for free is fundamental in defining the work that volunteers will do. Volunteering is a social activity, something that people do which is outside of work, family and other responsibilities, and is done through choice alongside other spare time activities like going for a walk or watching a film. It has to compete with all of these other social activities and press all of the right buttons. (deliver desired outcomes.)

The areas and type of work that volunteers might do for you will be governed to some extent by type of organisation you are, and your aims and objectives.

There are a few points to consider in designing volunteer roles:

- does the volunteering accomplish real work, achieve real objectives and is challenging enough to attract a wide range of people?
- are there a range of opportunities to attract a diverse group of people?
- is there work that can be done by any willing helper, as well as specialist opportunities for people with expertise?
- is there flexibility in the way the work can be accomplished?
- is there something for people who have a lot of time to spare as well as those who have a little?
- is there something for people who are happy to make a long term commitment and others who only want to volunteer next weekend?
- are there opportunities for groups and families to work on something together, as well as for individual volunteers
- do you have opportunities which fit in with volunteers' availability, such as during the day time, evenings and weekends?

Who can help in designing work for volunteers?

One way of ensuring that you develop a range of opportunities is to involve a range of people to help identify likely opportunities. These should be people who are stakeholders in your organisation and will have a different 'take' on what volunteers can contribute.

Paid staff

If your organisation has paid staff, one way of creating new opportunities while at the same time making sure that volunteers' are welcome to involve the staff in developing the work. Ask them:

- what are we doing now that we would do more of if we had the resources?
- what parts of the work do you really like?
- what parts do you dislike, but someone else with time/skills might enjoy?
- what could we do if we had specialist skills?
- what could we do if we had unlimited resources?

Involving staff in this way will ensure that volunteers' work is respected in the organisation and that staff have a commitment to its success. Answers will give an idea of the type of jobs that might be done.

Client involvement

It is easy to overlook the views of the people who may be on the receiving end of volunteers' efforts. It is important to involve clients/service users in the discussion about volunteers and explain the benefits so that they do not feel that they are being given a second rate service. You can explain that the benefits of volunteers are:

- having people who *choose* to work with you
- having people who *want* to be there rather than *have* to be
- volunteers are not 'professionals' or connected to the 'establishment'

Consulting clients on what sort of additional services they would like often leads to imaginative and more interesting opportunities for volunteers. Of particular importance in Wales is to check if clients are first language Welsh users to give an indication of the level of need for Welsh speaking volunteers. This can also apply with black and minority ethnic communities.

Consult funders

It is useful to discuss the introduction/development of volunteering with funders to ensure that it does not infringe any existing funding agreements. It may also be useful to ask their views because it might be possible to enhance existing services.

Designing volunteer roles

Volunteer work and the way it is presented directly determines the sort of people who will be attracted to it, so if you simply put up a poster asking for volunteers you are likely to get a very limited response. Remember that the more ways you have of involving volunteers; the easier it will be to recruit them and the more likelihood there is of attracting a diverse group of volunteers.

The process of drawing up **role descriptions** helps build a picture of the sort of people who might do it, but take care not to limit your vision or you will miss the opportunity to involve people who can bring a range of ideas, skills and enthusiasms. Some of the benefits of having a role description are:

- define volunteers' role within the organisation
- give status to volunteering in the organisation
- clarify their responsibilities
- identify the boundaries

The discipline of producing a role description will help identify whether the task is realistic and achievable. Kumi Naidoo, the Chief Executive of the World Fellowship Organisation Civicus tells a funny story, the gist of which is "How do you eat an elephant?" Answer "In bite sized chunks." (The humour lies in the fact that the story was told to a member of a wildlife organisation, who wasn't at all amused!) You may want volunteers to make the world a nicer place, but they can only achieve it a little at a time.

When you are developing opportunities you should constantly put yourself in a volunteer's place and ask:

- Why would I want to do this?
- What will I get out of it?
- What experience/skills/training will I need to do it?
- How will I achieve it?
- How will I know when I've achieved it?

If you can answer these in a satisfactory way you are ready to draw up a volunteer role description.

Role descriptions

Role descriptions help to identify how volunteers and their work will be managed. They can be used in recruitment for promoting volunteering and should therefore include a section on what the opportunity offers in the way of rewards and benefits. A role description could include the following:

Title: The word 'volunteer' on its own is not a role descriptor but a pay category. Give the role a name which describes the work to be carried out and which shows that it is valued.

Purpose: This is the most important part of the role description because it puts into context and places immediate value on the work you are asking people to do. For example you may want to recruit someone to provide a dog walking service to an elderly person but if you state that the purpose is to help a housebound person stay at home and out of residential care for as long as possible, potential volunteers can instantly appreciate how important the work is.

Suggested activities: Examples of what might be done to accomplish the purpose. The word 'suggested' indicates that volunteers have some authority to think, to

pursue other approved activities if the organiser agrees these might be effective in achieving the overall purpose.

Measures: This links back to the need for people to have targets to aim for and to know when they are achieving them. The organisation will have its own ideas of the measures it wants volunteers to achieve, but volunteers themselves should have the opportunity to suggest others.

Example measures for a volunteer befriender could be:

- To provide a befriending service for up to **three** clients.
- To visit each client on a regular appointed visit for a minimum of one hour a week.
- To raise **one** new topic of conversation at each visit.
- To identify **two** activities/facilities which will improve the client's quality of life.
- *To write up the 'visitor's log after each visit and pass to organiser.*
- To attend at least **three** pre-arranged supervision meetings with organiser.

Time scale: Estimates number of hours, and length of commitment. The profile of volunteers is changing and frequently people are looking for short term volunteering to fill gaps in careers or provide experience and skills to move on to something else. Offering opportunities that have no apparent conclusion can be intimidating. Even if the work is ongoing, like the befriending example above, putting a time limit of say six months or a year to a piece of work provides the impetus of working towards a goal and providing the opportunity for evaluation.

Site: Location of work.

Supervision: Relationships with staff and other volunteers, reporting requirements and supervisory relationships, as well as procedures for monitoring and dealing with problems.

Qualities: What skills, attitudes, and knowledge are desired, as well as any requirements such as dress or conduct.

Benefits: **This should list things that are necessary to carry out the work such as training, insurance, provision of clothing and equipment, and reimbursement of expenses. It should also include any additional rewards your organisation provides such as references, certificates, awards, accreditation, thank-you events.**

A diversity of volunteer roles

Aim for as diverse a set of role descriptions as possible to suit a range of different people. This will help you when you are ready to recruit:

- Continuous/ongoing assignments and also short term/one-off projects
- Tasks for an individual and tasks for a small or large group
- Tasks for which a volunteer may be 'on call' to help as necessary
- Generalist and specialist roles
- Work to be done off site and work on site

- Work dealing with people, with things and with ideas
- Hands on work and thinking/planning or observation
- Your organisation's basic volunteer roles and also a wish list of some possible new volunteer roles

Model Volunteer Role Description : Wildlife Conservation volunteer

Aim of volunteering role: To work in the Wildlife Team, which is part of Our Town Environmental Task Force, a group of paid staff and volunteers who work on a variety of environmental projects with the aim of improving the quality of life in Our Town.

The objective of the volunteering role is to: help ensure that wildlife habitats are protected, that their sites are maintained, and that people from the local community are made aware of the richness and diversity of the local area.

Tasks:

1. Recognise and record wildlife activity in areas designated by the Volunteer Manager
2. Carry out minor maintenance tasks on fencing and dry stone walls
3. Help to present information and arrange activities for visitors to help them to better understand wildlife in Our Town.

Time:

Volunteers are welcome to spend as long or as short a time working with us, so long as it is by arrangement with the Volunteer Manager. It is preferred that you commit to a minimum of one day a month. There are volunteers' social meetings every two months to which you will be invited.

Place of work:

Our base is at the EnviroDome, Station Road, Our Town although most of the work will be at various sites around the town under the guidance of the Volunteer Organiser.

Volunteer manager:

John Jenkins, Team Leader, Our Town Environmental Task Force

Transport:

Transport between the EnviroDome and the work sites is provided and there we are good public transport links between here and the town centre.

Skills required:

1. Interest in and commitment to the environment, particularly with indigenous wildlife.
2. Interest in and ability to work with people from all walks of life
3. A good communicator, a sense of humour, flexibility and a team player.

References: no references are required for this work. However, if you transfer to the schools project or any work which brings you into contact with children or vulnerable adults, you will have to provide two references and undergo a police check.

Materials required:

Wellington boots and waterproof can be provided if necessary. All tools are supplied.

Benefits offered:

1. Full training on environmental issues, health and safety and first aid
2. On the job training where necessary
3. Travelling costs and meal allowances are paid
4. Full insurance cover
5. Free membership and admission to organisation properties throughout the UK
6. Social events and activities.

Our thanks to Volunteering England, author of this information sheet

