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Writing an Advert for Volunteers

Writing an advert that will attract people to volunteering for you can be quite difficult. You need to provide enough information to interest people but keep it short enough to keep their attention. If you have gone through the initial step of working out why someone would want to volunteer for you and who is most likely to volunteer for you, then you have a good solid basis on which to base your advert. The exact form the advert takes will depend on whom it is meant to attract and where it will be appearing but there are some basic things it should include:

The Need

A statement of need is a useful starting point because it makes potential volunteers stop and think "somebody should do something about that" - a first step in them coming to the conclusion that the somebody 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. So, 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 volunteer working for a community farm you could say "some children growing up in this area have only ever seen cows and sheep on television."

The Role

Now that you have got people's attention and made them see the need for the type of work that you are advertising you can tell them how they can help meet this need. You can now move on to describe the activities that volunteers carry out in your organisation. Bear in mind that potential volunteers may not necessarily understand some of the language commonly used in the sector. Terms like 'advocate', 'support worker' and 'befriender' can be confusing if they are not explained. Even something like 'admin support' can be confusing as it encompasses 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.

The Fears

The next thing that you need to do is to dispel any fears that the potential volunteer may have about volunteering for you. They have perceived the need for volunteers, thought about whether they can see themselves in the role you have outlined and now will work through any reasons they can think of not to contact you! Now is the time to dispel any obvious fears that might arise. This could include information about who can volunteer (no previous experience is needed just an interest/enthusiasm for ...), a reassurance that they will be supported in the role (full training is 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).

The Benefits

By now the potential volunteer should have a definite idea of whether or not they are interested in the role. You need to make sure that they do take the next step towards volunteering for you, by describing how they will benefit. Remember that everyone volunteers for a reason. Your first step when devising a recruitment strategy for the role should have been to identify why somebody 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.

- So there it is, a model for a four part advert that: hooks people by presenting the need for volunteers, describes how they can help, negates some of the reasons that they may come up with not to help and finally sells the position to them by describing how they will benefit from volunteering for you. You can use it as the basis for all your adverts. You could use a short version for posters and newspaper adverts and expand on it for articles or even radio interviews.

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