

4. Volunteers

4.6 Diversity in volunteering



What is diversity?

A diverse organisation is one which values difference. It is one which recognises that people with different backgrounds, skills, attitudes and experiences bring fresh ideas and perceptions. Organisations should encourage and harness these differences to make their services relevant and approachable. A diverse organisation draws upon the widest possible range of views and experiences, so it can listen to, and meet, the changing needs of its users, staff, volunteers, partners and supporters.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD) describes managing diversity as follows:

‘Managing diversity is based on the concept that people should be valued as individuals for reasons related to business interests, as well as for moral and social reasons. It recognises that people from different backgrounds can bring fresh ideas and perceptions which can make the way work is done more efficient and its products and services better.

Managing diversity successfully will help organisations to nurture creativity and innovation and thereby to tap hidden capacity for growth and improved competitiveness’.

Managing diversity - a CIPD position paper, 1996

The CIPD explains that the effective management of diversity can help counteract prejudice against a wide range of personal differences, for example: academic or vocational qualification, accent, age, caring responsibilities, ethnic origin, gender, learning difficulties, marital status, physical and mental abilities, political affiliation, previous mental illness, religion, sexual orientation, spent or irrelevant convictions and, trade union or non-trade union membership.

The benefits of diversity

There are numerous benefits from having a diverse volunteer ‘workforce’. For example, your organisation will:

- present a more welcoming face to volunteers, client groups and the general public
- be more representative of our wider society
- be more able to respond to the needs of your local community

- benefit from the new ideas and fresh approaches being generated by people from different backgrounds, cultures, genders, ages and outlooks
- attract more customers and service users

Increase the diversity of your volunteers

Attracting a more diverse volunteer team needs active and targeted recruitment – having a diversity statement, while a good start, is not enough on its own. Which languages are you using? What impression does your publicity material give? Are your messages inclusive? Is there visible diversity in the images you use? You may also choose to:

- Look at the way you advertise for and recruit volunteers - Where are you advertising? How are you advertising? What sort of language are you using?
- look at the arrangements you make for your volunteers – do they enable everyone to get involved? For example:
 - when organising meetings and other activities have you considered the most inclusive time, disability access, translators/sign language interpreters, child-friendly arrangements, if you're providing food - is it suitable?
 - can you pay expenses?
 - how much time are volunteers expected to give, can you tailor the opportunity to their availability?
 - do you take into account different religious holidays in your planning?

- are you offering a choice of ways to get involved?
- do target your recruitment, but try to avoid tokenism

- Make sure you welcome all your volunteers and give them a good induction. Consider introducing a mentoring or buddy scheme. Do you have 'volunteer agreements' and 'voluntary work outlines' and are they appropriate to all the volunteers you are trying to attract?
- Ask your volunteers if they need any extra support or modified equipment, such as textphones (sometimes known as minicomms), screen magnifiers, large button telephones or computer keyguards.
- Ensure your procedures are as informal as possible (bureaucratic rules can be very excluding).
- Involve volunteers fully in the development of your organisation and its diversity strategies by asking them for their thoughts.

Further information

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