

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Supporting charities, volunteers and communities

4. Volunteers

4.4 Recruiting, selecting and inducting volunteers



Why involve volunteers?

Before involving volunteers, it is worth spending some time considering how they can work within your organisation. It is essential for the organisation to identify tasks that are appropriate for the volunteer to undertake, prior to the recruitment and selection process. As volunteers do not replace paid workers, they should be viewed as complementing the role, thus bringing added value to the organisation.

It is important to identify who is going to take responsibility for volunteers. You could ask yourself:

- what level of induction and training will the volunteer require?
- will the opportunities you are providing enable the volunteer to develop new skills whilst also using their existing abilities, knowledge and experiences?
- What tasks do you expect them to fulfil?

Recruitment and advertising

Once you have a clear idea of the different opportunities you can offer volunteers, the next stage is to think about:

- the kind of person that would be interested in those roles
- how you will attract them to your organisation

Where to advertise?

- schools and colleges
- libraries
- public buildings
- dental and doctor surgeries
- shop windows
- job centres
- buses
- local television, newspapers and radio
- word of mouth
- community centres
- internet e.g. www.volunteering-wales.net

Where to recruit?

- register with your local volunteer centre
- give talks and presentations to interested groups
- link in with other community events that attract large numbers of people
- set up a market stall
- fêtes and carnivals
- careers and recruitment fairs

When designing printed information you may wish to consider the following:

- keep the message simple
- make sure it reflects the nature of the volunteering opportunity
- who are your target audience
- design posters and leaflets which are eye catching and accessible avoid jargon
- have materials printed into community languages

Task descriptions

These are an important part of the planning process in deciding what role volunteers will play in your organisation.

Prior to drawing up a task description, you may want to consider the following questions:

- what tasks do you have that you need volunteers to do?
- how might these tasks be combined to create a role?
- how much training, support and supervision could you give?
- is there scope for any role to develop?
- what skills would volunteers need to have already?

Selection

The selection process you adopt will depend on your organisation and the work that volunteers undertake within it. All organisations need to establish a system that will not only suit their needs, but one that does not put unnecessary barriers in the way of potential volunteers.

The selection process should be a two-way process. It should enable the organisation to decide on the suitability of potential volunteers whilst enabling volunteers to decide whether they feel suited to the organisation. If volunteers are unsuitable for their chosen opportunities and it is not possible to find them an alternative, it is the responsibility of your organisation to be honest.

Rather than emphasising their unsuitability, highlight their skills and qualities and direct them to their nearest volunteer centre. (See Information sheet 4.1 or visit www.volunteering-wales.net)

It is the role of the centre staff to find other, more suitable voluntary work for would-be volunteers.

Application forms

If you decide to use an application form then be clear about what information you need and why you need it. Keep the form as simple as possible. You should state if the position is exempted from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA) 1974 and that a criminal records check (disclosure) will be asked for. Requests for such information will be in accordance with the Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) Code of Practice.

Interviewing

The word 'interview' can be very off-putting and unless you need to conduct a formal interview the term 'come in for a chat' or 'come in to talk' will put potential volunteers at ease.

When interviewing a potential volunteer you may wish to cover the following areas:

- what attracted them to your organisation
- what they have been doing for the previous year or two
- what they hope to gain from volunteering
- what, if any relevant skills, knowledge, experience and interests they have
- their availability
- any resources they will need, for example an induction loop etc.

Induction

Once you have recruited your volunteers you will need to ensure they are provided with adequate support and supervision. Support comes in many forms, and often a well-organised induction session and pack will provide volunteers with the support they initially require. Induction should not consist of simply giving volunteers policies to read and introducing them to other volunteers and staff.

Getting the induction process right can help your organisation retain its volunteers for longer.

When volunteers start with your organisation you may want to:

- introduce them to other staff and volunteers
- show them around the building
- explain who they can go to if they have any questions or problems
- show them where they will be sitting and where they can find any equipment they need
- let them know about breaks
- explain how to claim expenses

- explain your organisation's policy on volunteers using telephones or accessing the Internet for their own use
- get them to shadow other experienced volunteers or paid member of staff

These are informal points, but they are important because they help volunteers feel more comfortable within your organisation. Organisational policies and procedures are better left until volunteers have gone through day-to-day practicalities. If you do it this way volunteers will feel more relaxed and competent when you move onto more complex areas. By this time, volunteers should feel more confident about asking you to explain anything they do not fully understand. When you move onto formal matters, ensure volunteers understand the issues by going through policies and procedures with them.

These more formal issues could include:

- your organisation's policies and procedures e.g. equal opportunities, health and safety etc.
- the history, ethos and structure of the organisation
- how to deal with complaints and areas of concern
- the volunteer's agreement

The volunteer may find it useful if the information they are given is kept in a handbook or pack.

The rest of the induction period will be taken up with on-going training, and volunteers trying out the type of work they will be doing. The duration and depth of induction will depend on the role and level of resources available. If you work closely with volunteers during this initial period it will provide you with a better picture of how they work, what support they will need, and what they are hoping to gain.

Volunteers' rights and responsibilities

Volunteering is a two-way process. Whilst volunteers bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience, an organisation can teach volunteers new skills too.

Here are some suggested rights and responsibilities, however, this is not an exhaustive list and you may choose some of your own. Volunteers have the right to:

- know what is expected of them
- clearly specified lines of support and supervision
- be shown appreciation
- a safe work environment
- be insured
- know what their rights
- be paid expenses
- be trained
- be free from discrimination

- be provided with opportunities for personal development
- complement the paid worker, not replace them

Organisations should expect volunteers to:

- be reliable
- be honest
- respect confidentiality
- make the most of training and support opportunities
- carry out tasks in a way that reflects the aims of the organisation
- work within the agreed guidelines and remit

References

Most organisations will ask volunteers to provide two references. This is essential especially when the organisation works with vulnerable people, for example, children, older people, those with a learning disability etc. In these situations asking for a reference from a friend or family member may not be appropriate, whereas a reference from a previous employer, tutor or teacher would be ideal.

Providing references may be difficult for those who have been unemployed for a long period of time, young people who have limited work experience, or those who are volunteering as part of their recovery. When requesting references, be clear about what information you require, such as reliability, punctuality, honesty, ability to handle money etc. Make sure the reference form is short and concise and to ensure the form is returned promptly, enclose a self-addressed envelope for their reply.

Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

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