

From Barriers to Bridges

A guide for volunteer-
involving organisations

For Everyone Who Works With Volunteers



Supported by Abbey National plc as part of Volunteers' Week



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Introduction

Why don't more people volunteer? What is it that stops them making that first approach, or causes them to back out after making an initial enquiry? If they do volunteer, what makes them stop? And why do so many organisations only have volunteers from a very narrow section of society?

Often, it's because people have come up against something that puts them off or actively prevents them getting involved. If your organisation wants to recruit more volunteers, and keep them for longer, you need to know what these barriers are.

This booklet will show you why and how you might attract more volunteers, from a wider section of the community, and how you can overcome those barriers to involvement. It 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.

Last year, the Prime Minister set the voluntary sector a challenge to achieve 'a really diverse involvement of people with their organisations – a diversity that reflects the nation we live in'.

This booklet will help you meet that challenge, by showing how your organisation can be more welcoming to potential volunteers. Diversity brings immense rewards – your organisation will present a more welcoming face to volunteers, client groups and the general public, and you will benefit from the new ideas and fresh approaches being generated by people from a broad spectrum of backgrounds, cultures, genders, ages and outlooks.

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What are perceived as the barriers to volunteering?

- Am I allowed to volunteer?
- Can I afford it?
- What will they ask me to do?
- How much time do they want me to give?
- Will I be treated well?
- Will I get on with the people?

These are just some of the questions people ask themselves when considering whether or not to offer their time. Some might be worried that volunteering could affect their benefits, others may wonder if they're too young, or too old. Asylum seekers may be concerned about jeopardising their application, while some potential volunteers may be worried that paid staff will see them as a threat to their jobs.

In fact, there are very few restrictions that should prevent anyone from getting involved. Detailed here are some of the commonly perceived barriers to volunteering, and a few suggestions your organisation may want to consider to encourage more volunteers to come on board.

Perceptions about voluntary work and volunteers

Preconceptions about who volunteers and what's involved may be a barrier to people coming forward and offering their time. They may have an image in their mind of the sort of people who volunteer, and possibly think that 'volunteering's not for me'.

So what sort of people do volunteer? The answer is 'all sorts'! In a recent national survey, it was revealed that 48% of women in the UK, and coincidentally 48% of men, are regularly involved in formal volunteering. 74% of the population is involved in informal volunteering.

As for age, the survey found that 43% of people aged between 18 and 24 are actively involved in volunteering activities. Participation tends to peak in middle age, with 57% of people aged 45 to 54 actively involved, and the level for those over the age of 65 falling to 45%. Thirty-five per cent of people aged over 75 volunteer.

While the sample was small, the survey also found differing participation rates among ethnic minority groups. Forty one per cent of black and Asian people are actively involved in volunteering, and for people from other ethnic groups the figure is 36%.

The researchers asked those not involved in volunteering, why not? The key reasons given were: no time; don't know any other volunteers; and don't have

the necessary skills and experience. Those who had expressed an interest in volunteering were asked what would make it easier for them to get involved. Key encouragements noted were: being asked; if someone helped me get started; if family or friends were involved too; if I knew it would improve my skills; if I could do it from home; and if it led to a qualification.

With disabled people, those on lower incomes and people from ethnic minorities under-represented among volunteers, you may want to use these research results and key encouragements as a starting point to evaluate just who currently volunteers for you, and how you could attract those who don't. How could you 'tap into' more young, unemployed people in your area? Does the ethnic mix of your volunteers reflect your local community? How could you attract more people with disabilities?

Benefits

People receiving benefits are often uncertain of the rules around volunteering. Booklet WK4, Financial help if you are working or doing voluntary 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. However, people receiving JSA should be aware that they have to remain both available for, and actively seeking work.

The Benefits Agency also states that volunteers receiving JSA should tell their Jobcentre if they do any voluntary work. Similarly, recipients of Income Support, Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance must tell their social security office of any voluntary activity. Other social security benefits are not usually affected by voluntary work. If in doubt, check. Anyone with queries on benefits and volunteering can call the National Centre for Volunteering's information line (020 7520 8900) for advice.

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 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 give you receipts and bus/train tickets. Flat rate expenses (eg: giving volunteers

a standard £2.50 for lunch) could be seen as income by the Benefits Agency and the Inland Revenue.

Children and other dependants

Having children or other dependants should not be a barrier to volunteering. If at all possible care expenses should be paid, or facilities provided. Think about other family-friendly policies too, such as flexibility over hours, volunteering from home and so on.

Seeking asylum

The ban on volunteering by asylum seekers (people in the process of applying for refugee status) was lifted in April 2000. The current guidance from the Home Office National Asylum Support Service is available on the National Centre for Volunteering's website on www.volunteering.org.uk/asylum.htm or by sending an SAE, marked Info on Asylum Seekers and Volunteering (see page 11 for address).

Criminal records

Having a criminal record need not be a barrier to volunteering. Only in special cases, such as care of vulnerable clients or handling large sums of money, should relevant convictions be taken into account. The National Centre for Volunteering has two briefing papers, Screening Volunteers and Safe Involvement of Volunteers with Vulnerable Clients, which detail the considerations (see page 11 for contact details).

Bridging the barriers

Think 'diversity' when recruiting

Diversity means recognising and valuing variety among your volunteers. It means celebrating difference.

There are numerous benefits of 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 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 differing backgrounds, cultures, genders, ages and outlooks

- attract more customers and service users.

For these reasons it is wise to cast your net as widely as possible when looking for new volunteers, taking the trouble not just to attract people from similar backgrounds.

Recruiting volunteers needs careful thought and planning – you need to consider who you want to involve and why. The reasons for involving volunteers should be clear at all levels of the organisation, and policies and support structures need to be in place before anyone is interviewed.

You may want to ask yourself "who isn't volunteering with us at the moment?" If people from certain groups aren't coming forward, look for the possible reasons. What message does your recruitment material send out? What kind of image does your organisation have in your local community?

Is the way you're recruiting effective? Putting up posters asking for volunteers might seem a suitable approach, but they need to appeal to those you want to reach. If you're looking to attract young people, for example, you may want to emphasise on your poster that volunteering can help them learn new skills, enhance their CV and improve their career prospects.

Similarly, your posters need to be put up where your target group will see them – you will want to display them in different places to attract older or disabled people, people from minority communities, working parents ... to name just a few.

Word of mouth is a very important recruitment tool. Volunteers who feel good about their time with your organisation are likely to tell their friends, and this can be one of the best ways to ensure a steady supply of new volunteers. But be careful not to rely too heavily on this method, as it can lead to recruiting from the same groups of people.

It can be very difficult to turn down people who want to volunteer, but if they don't match the 'vacancy' 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 bureaux can be particularly helpful.

Keeping your volunteers

Prospective volunteers may worry about how they will be treated in your organisation. Your organisation needs to make an effort to be welcoming, and prepare properly for volunteers.

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 a grievance and disciplinary procedure. This means volunteers have a standard by which they can expect to be treated, and a mechanism for addressing problems and taking up complaints. A volunteer policy may also help to allay certain concerns at an early stage, e.g. expenses, insurance, support mechanisms.

The National Centre for Volunteering's Good Practice Guide (see page 11) includes a sample volunteer policy. Further sample policies, including a grievance and disciplinary procedure, can be obtained by contacting the National Centre for Volunteering's information line on 020 7520 8900.

Induction

All volunteers should be given an induction into the organisation and the area of work they will be undertaking. You could consider using 'volunteer agreements' and 'voluntary work outlines'. Although they introduce an element of formality they can help to ensure that both parties are clear about what the volunteering will involve.

'Volunteer agreements' set out the commitment that your organisation makes to the volunteer (eg: the expenses they will receive). 'Voluntary work outlines' detail the specific work they will be doing, rather like a job description. You should note on these documents that they are not intended to imply contracts of employment, so no confusion arises. Examples of both of these agreements are set out in National Centre for Volunteering's Good Practice Guide (see page 11).

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.

Meeting individual needs

Ask your volunteers if they need any extra support or equipment, such as:

- textphones (sometimes known as minicomms) – allow hearing impaired people to communicate over the telephone using a keyboard and visual display.
- screen magnifiers – magnify images on computer monitors
- large button telephones – for visually impaired people or those with dexterity difficulties
- computer keyguards – help people who have dexterity problems typing.

Places of volunteering should be accessible to everyone. This can be as much a problem of attitude as architecture. High-contrast colours on internal signs and edges of steps, for example, could help people with visual impairments.

Support and supervision

Volunteers should receive support and supervision from line managers. As with paid staff, this gives volunteers the opportunity to discuss needs and concerns, and receive feedback on their work.

Some volunteers may need extra support because of inexperience of your specific working environment, so you may want to consider introducing some form of mentoring or buddying system. Some volunteers find it very helpful to have a more experienced volunteer, or a paid member of staff to talk to informally.

Invitation to participate

Volunteers should be encouraged to become integrated into the daily life of your organisation. It can be alienating to be seen as someone who comes in, performs their task and leaves, without having any say in the organisation, or being invited to any social events. This could be perceived as a lowering of their status, and can become a barrier to their further involvement.

Recognition

Volunteers will stay and contribute to your organisation if they're treated well.

You can personally and privately recognise the value of your volunteers by:

- saying thank you, perhaps by hosting a social event where your volunteers can be awarded certificates or volunteer of the year awards. Volunteers' Week (1-7 June each year) is an excellent opportunity to organise something special.
- providing learning opportunities such as in-house or other training opportunities.
- including a discussion of voluntary activity in your annual review and other reports of your work. Specify the time, commitment and skills of volunteers who have contributed to your organisation.
- recognising that the retention of volunteers is only one measure of success, for many their moving on will be the outcome of your achievements in supporting them.

Sample equal opportunities policy

Overleaf is an example of an Equal Opportunities Policy. It is intended to be a guideline rather than a blueprint, and should be adapted for your organisation's individual needs. An Equal Opportunities Policy is the foundation on which a truly diverse organisational culture can be built.

Anyorg equal opportunities policy

1. Statement of Policy

- 1.1 AnyOrg recognises that for an equal opportunities policy to be effective it must encompass all areas of its activities.
- 1.2 AnyOrgs aim is to achieve an active membership, which reflects the composition of the communities it serves.
- 1.3 It will take steps to ensure that a programme of action is implemented to achieve equality of access to all sites managed by AnyOrg and activities organised by AnyOrg.
- 1.4 AnyOrg will act to ensure that membership activities and events attract people from all sectors of the community and such activities do not discriminate against members of disadvantaged groups.
- 1.5 AnyOrg will take steps to ensure that harassment and discrimination on the basis of race, gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation or disability is not experienced by individuals and groups on sites managed by AnyOrg.

2. Implementation

- 2.1 Membership
The equal opportunities post on the Executive Committee has a remit, which includes a review of membership recruitment strategies to ensure that people from all sectors of the community are encouraged to join and that no particular individuals or groups are at a disadvantage.
- 2.2 AnyOrg will endeavour to ensure that the make-up of AnyOrgs trustees and committees have a balanced composition. Consideration will be given to the co-option onto the above committees of individuals representing groups who are presently under-represented in AnyOrgs organisational structure.

Any person breaking these rules may be excluded from the organisation.

- 2.3 Membership information and other relevant material will be translated into other appropriate languages, as finances become available.
- 2.4 Local Groups will be requested to regularly review their activities in the light of the need to achieve the equal opportunities policy objectives as detailed the statement above and in the statement on AnyOrg as an employer.

3. Organisation Activities

- 3.1 AnyOrgs statement on equal opportunities will be displayed on all premises/sites used by AnyOrg and distributed to all management committee members.
- 3.2 Members and volunteers and visitors to AnyOrg will be expected to adhere to the equal opportunities policy and comply with the rules of behaviour as outlined below.
- 3.3 The rules of behaviour should be viewed in the light of AnyOrgs commitment to the elimination of discrimination and harassment against individuals and particular groups set out in the policy statement in paragraph (1) above. The following types of behaviour are unacceptable.
 - Attacks on individuals or groups on the basis of their race, gender, ethnic origin, disability or sexual orientation
 - Discriminatory name calling, insulting remarks, jokes or threats
 - Writing such remarks on walls or other places.
 - Encouraging other people to harass or discriminate against another individual or group.
 - Provocative behaviour such as the wearing of racist/sexist or fascist insignia or the introduction of similar literature to the site.

Further reading

The following publications are available from the National Centre for Volunteering by calling the marketing assistant on 020 7520 8936. The National Centre for Volunteering's website (www.volunteering.org.uk) also contains a wealth of suggestions on volunteer management. You can also order publications on-line.

The Good Practice Guide

Advice and information for everyone who works with volunteers. Includes a number of sample forms to adapt for your organisation. *The National Centre for Volunteering, 1998, £12*

The Route to Opportunity series: Volunteering by People with Disabilities; Volunteering by Young People; Volunteering by Unemployed People; Volunteering by Black People; Volunteering by Older People.

These five books look at how to successfully involve volunteers from different sections of society. Each book sets out the relevant issues, identifies examples of successful practice and lists advice for organisations seeking to recruit volunteers. *The National Centre for Volunteering, 1996, £5 each, all 5 for £20*

My Time, My Community, Myself

Experience of volunteering within the black community. Looks at the context of black volunteering, motivation and successful recruitment strategies. *The National Centre for Volunteering, 1997, £13.50*

Disability Equality in Volunteering

A good practice guide looking at how to successfully recruit and involve volunteers with disabilities. *Skill, 1998, £10*

Contact details:
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**National Association of
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**Volunteer Development
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**Volunteer Development
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**Wales Council for Voluntary
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**The Active Community Unit at
the Home Office: 020 72178419**

**All the planning group members are membership organisations. To join, phone
them on the numbers above**



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