



### **Engaging Volunteers – All You Need to Know**

*(Article submitted by Diane Ledger, GRANTfinder Information Researcher)*

#### **Introduction**

Recruiting and retaining volunteers is a very competitive business. There are plenty of other organisations and pastimes other than yours that potential volunteers can get involved with/in. There are no guarantees that your organisation will recruit and retain volunteers successfully from the word go, but by keeping abreast of good practice in volunteer management and recruitment, and implementing it, this can only boost your success rate when engaging volunteers within your organisation.

The aim of this guide is to offer you some ideas and tips on issues you may wish to consider when involving volunteers within your organisation, such as: who can volunteer, recruiting volunteers, and good practice policies which will help you to retain your volunteers.

#### **What is a Volunteer?**

A volunteer is anyone who is providing a service, without pay, to the benefit of people, groups, communities or the environment. It is a commitment to offer time and energy without financial gain. A volunteer's role within your organisation should be to complement the work of paid staff, not become a substitute for it.

#### **Who Can Volunteer?**

The general rule is there are no limitations on who can volunteer. People have the right to volunteer regardless of age, ability and financial status. However, there are considerations that will need to be taken into account. The following information will guide you through some of the more general queries often related to volunteering:

##### Involving young volunteers

While there are legal restrictions on *employing* young people, they do not in general apply to recruiting young *volunteers* (under the age of 16). However, even if your organisation is not bound by it, it is worth being aware of the legislation.

Section 18 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and subsequent amendments limit employment to those aged 13 or over. The Act states that *no child under minimum school leaving age may be employed before 7am or after 7pm on any day, or for more than two hours on any school day or Sunday*. The legislation also requires that children must have a minimum of two weeks free from work during the school holidays.

A potential young volunteer will have many commitments and you will need to take into account how much time is spent on these commitments. They include for example:

- \* school/college commitments;
- \* homework;
- \* sports and social activities; and
- \* family commitment eg: caring for a sibling, parent etc.

It is advisable to acquire parental/guardian consent when involving young volunteers. Both the young person and their parent or guardian should be fully aware of what the volunteering will entail. Provide, if you can, clear information about the organisation and the duties the volunteer is expected to do, preferably a task description. Make sure that the volunteer and their family are aware of time commitments, where the work will take place and how it will be supervised.

#### Involving refugees and asylum seekers

Since April 2000, asylum seekers (people in the process of applying for refugee status) have been allowed to volunteer. This includes those that are appealing against a decision to refuse them asylum, and those whose application has been turned down, but are registered with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for return to their home country when practical. Whilst asylum seekers receive a document declaring that they must not engage in paid or unpaid work, this in fact does not include genuine voluntary work. Home Office guidance states that care should be taken to ensure that activity undertaken by an asylum seeker is for a not-for-profit organisation, and does not amount to either employment or job substitution. It confirms that asylum seekers are entitled to receive out-of-pocket expenses just like other volunteers.

For Home Office guidance see:

<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/voluntaryworkers/>

#### Involving volunteers from overseas

There is no restriction on people from EU countries coming to the UK to volunteer. People from outside the EU who have a visa to work or study in the UK may volunteer as long as they are still undertaking the activity that is stated on their visa. It is possible to get a visa to come to the UK to volunteer, but this must be arranged in advance and certain restrictions apply.

### **Volunteering and Welfare Benefits**

Genuine voluntary work should not affect a volunteer's entitlement to any benefit. Below is a summary of some of the main benefits your potential volunteers may be in receipt of. The summary is of course subject to change, and further information should be sought from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus.

#### Volunteers claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)

JSA claimants are fully entitled to volunteer, as long as they meet the two key conditions of eligibility for JSA: that they remain available for work and that they are actively seeking work.

In a concession from the general rules on availability, volunteers do not have to be available to start work immediately. They must be able to start work with one week's notice, or attend an interview for work at 48 hours' notice.

#### Volunteers claiming Income Support

People on Income Support are fully entitled to volunteer for as many hours as they like. As with JSA, they should not receive any income from their voluntary work other than genuine reimbursement of expenses, or they could face deductions from their benefit.

## Volunteers claiming Incapacity Benefit

People on incapacity benefit are fully entitled to volunteer. Volunteering should not call into question a person's incapacity to work. There are no hour limits on volunteering by people on incapacity benefit. In the past there was a limit of 16 hours per week on average, but this was removed in October 1998.

## **Recruiting Volunteers**

There are many ways to recruit your potential volunteers, some more effective than others. It is safe to say always ensure your publicity is accessible and looks professional. A poorly laid-out, badly photocopied poster will not give out a very good first impression to your prospective volunteer. The following tips can help you on your way:

- \* Be aware of trying to fit too much information in too small a space.
- \* Use upper and lower cases. **DISPLAYING EVERYTHING IN BLOCK CAPITALS AND/OR EMBOLDENED TEXT IS HARD TO READ.**
- \* Use colours sparingly in text.
- \* Ensure all the information needed is on the poster:
  - the name of your organisation;
  - a contact telephone number; and
  - very briefly, what the volunteering opportunity is.
- \* Try to create a title that will grab your readers' attention, for example:

"What are **you** doing on Wednesday?"

"Everybody's Got Life Skills, We Need Yours"

"Go on Give it a Go"

Now you have your poster, make the most of it. The following list will give you some ideas of where to advertise, many of which are free:

- \* Your local Volunteer Centre.
- \* Your local Council for Voluntary Service.
- \* Places of worship, e.g. mosques, churches, temples, synagogues.
- \* Meeting/leisure places, parks, clubs, cafes, pubs.
- \* Sports centres.
- \* Shopping centres, markets, supermarkets and shops.
- \* The local Jobcentre.
- \* Local Authority and Council offices.
- \* Doctors surgeries or hospital waiting rooms.
- \* Nurseries, schools or adult education colleges.
- \* Public libraries.
- \* Post offices.
- \* Local and free newspapers (through adverts or a weekly column).
- \* Community and hospital radio stations.
- \* Seasonal and community events, such as fairs or car boot sales.

## **Interviewing Volunteers**

Now you have people hammering at your door to volunteer, don't let them get away! Try to get them on board as soon as possible, before someone else does.

- \* Arrange for them to come for an interview or an 'informal chat' as soon as possible.
- \* If you require references, ask the volunteer to bring the details along with them.
- \* Explain what voluntary roles you have on offer in your organisation. Talk it through with the prospective volunteer, asking them what they would like to do.
- \* Offer some examples of what they will receive in return. However, be honest and only state what your organisation is capable of. This could include the following:
  - Regular support sessions.
  - Regular volunteer forums.
  - Training and development opportunities.
  - Involvement in team meetings, staff conferences and members' events.
  - Recognition of volunteer work.
  - Social events.
  - Out-of-pocket expenses eg travel and lunch.
- \* It is important to communicate the outcome of the interview. Explain the procedure and the timescale. If you decide you want to take them on as a volunteer, give them the opportunity to consider and reflect.
- \* In many cases Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks are required, which can delay a volunteer starting. Keep them interested by providing them with an information pack to take away about your organisation, and keep them fully informed of the progress of the CRB check.

### **Induction for New Volunteers**

An induction programme is an essential part of any new member joining your organisation. Your new volunteer may have been away from the 'labour market' for a length of time, be lacking in confidence, or may still not quite be sure if volunteering is for them. An induction welcomes them to your organisation and helps them feel more at ease. What you include in your induction process should be as informative as it would be for a paid member of staff. The following is a guide to what can be included:

- \* A tour of the layout of the building (including fire escapes, toilets, etc).
- \* If it is a shared building, give a brief overview of who else uses the building.
- \* An introduction to other members of the organisation.
- \* If office based, show the volunteer where they will be placed.
- \* Health and safety issues ie evacuations procedure, who the appointed First Aid person is, how accidents should be reported.
- \* Explain how and what expenses can be claimed.
- \* The allocation of a parking permit if required.
- \* An explanation of data protection, confidentiality, phone and Internet use.

Most importantly, do not forget to inform them of breaks and lunch times; this is one of the most common items to be overlooked. Some organisations have very informal break times (ie whenever required), whereas others will be more formal and have set agreed times for breaks.

You will need certain information from your volunteer for your organisational records. This can be obtained by asking the volunteer to complete a few forms, either on their own or with your support. The following list will give you some ideas as to what you will require:

- \* Full name.
- \* Address (including postcode).
- \* Telephone number (home and mobile if applicable).
- \* Emergency contact details.
- \* Doctor's contact details.

- \* Any health issues that the organisation will need to be aware of for the protection of the volunteer and the organisation (eg diabetes, heart condition, arthritis, epilepsy).

## **A Volunteer Agreement**

A volunteer agreement may sound rather formal; however, as long as the organisation avoids any form of obligation or contractual language, the risk is outweighed by the benefits of having a written agreement. The agreement will show a commitment from the organisation, and set out what is expected of both parties. Depending on the nature of the volunteering opportunity, a volunteer agreement may include any or all of the following:

- \* Nature and purpose of the voluntary tasks.
- \* Hours and days the volunteer has agreed to undertake.
- \* Name and position of the person within the organisation who will support/supervise the volunteer.
- \* The volunteer's agreement to abide by the organisation's objects, its equal opportunities policy, health and safety policy, confidentiality policy etc.
- \* Arrangements for the volunteer's support session (reviewing of the volunteer's tasks, dealing with any problems that may arise etc).
- \* Notice the organisation would like to have when the volunteer requires time off, and who to notify.
- \* When and who to notify if the volunteer is unable to attend due to illness.
- \* The fact that the organisation and volunteer do not intend this agreement to be a legally binding document.

The agreement should be signed and dated both by the volunteer and the authorised person within the organisation. A copy should be kept by the organisation and the original retained by the volunteer.

The fact that the agreement is in writing and is signed does not mean that it is a contract. A contract is a legal relationship based on the nature of an agreement, and may be created regardless of whether or not an agreement is in writing.

## **Volunteer Expenses**

The reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses should be made available to all volunteers and will normally cover agreed travel costs. The following list will give you an idea of what other items can be classed as 'out-of-pocket expenses':

- \* Meals if volunteering for more than four hours, or over a mealtime.
- \* Specialist clothing.
- \* Tools.
- \* Actual costs of dependent care.
- \* Training.
- \* If volunteering from own home:
  - stationery;
  - postage; and
  - telephone or computer costs.

This list is not exhaustive and your organisation may have further costs for which the volunteer may need to be reimbursed. The following rule should be applied to all reimbursement of expenses. Expenses must be:

- 1) reimbursement of actual expenditure;
- 2) wholly necessary for the work; and
- 3) authorised as genuine.

HM Revenue and Customs sets a tax-free approved mileage rate for reimbursing travel expenses for people using their own vehicles for volunteering or employment. These can be obtained from HM Revenue and Customs:

<http://www.hmrcgov.uk/mileage/volunteer-drivers.htm>

The rates at the time of writing (for 2007/08) are:

Cars and vans: 40p per mile for the first 10,000 miles, and 25p for every mile thereafter.

Motorcycles: 24p per mile regardless of overall total.

Bicycles: 20p per mile, again, regardless of overall total.

## **Insurance**

Volunteers are not automatically covered by insurance; it is good practice to check with your insurer that volunteers are included in the cover your organisation already has.

If your organisation has Public Liability Insurance, this covers non-employees in the event of death, damage to property, loss of property and injury. It is essential to confirm with your insurance company that this policy also covers the acts of volunteers.

If your organisation has Employers' Liability Insurance (this is required by law if the organisation employs paid staff), this can be extended to cover the acts of volunteers.

The following list includes other types of insurance that are available:

- \* Personal accident cover.
- \* Protection of no-claims for volunteer drivers.
- \* Professional indemnity.
- \* Trustee liability.
- \* Legal claims insurance.

## **Unacceptable/Acceptable Language**

One of the trickier volunteering issues has long been the unclear boundary where volunteers can become workers or employees in the eyes of the law. Such a change in status can bring volunteers under the protection of employment legislation.

The following list is a guide to what language to use for volunteers to determine the difference between volunteer and employee.

### **Employee**

Contract

Employer

Employee

Unpaid staff member

Payment

Annual leave

Sick leave

### **Volunteer**

Arrangement

Organisation

Volunteer

Volunteer

Reimbursement for expenses

Arrangements for time off

Arrangements for when ill

Job description	Task description
Supervision/appraisal	Support session
Disciplinary procedure	Arrangements for if there are problems
Grievance procedure	Arrangements if the volunteer has a complaint or is unhappy
Dismissal	Ending the arrangement
Redundancy	No further need for the volunteer's tasks

### **What the Volunteer Says**

According to the 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey, over 26 million people in England and Wales take part in some sort of voluntary activity each year. The following is a collection of stories from volunteers offering a brief insight into why they volunteer.

*"I have been volunteering for six months now. Without my volunteering I'd be stuck at home on my own. Since beginning volunteering I have found a new direction in life and I've even gone back to college. The staff have made me feel welcome and part of the team, their support and encouragement has really boosted my confidence."*

Volunteer

*"I started volunteering a few years ago. I was a young mum, had moved house and all my friends lived 10 miles away. My confidence levels were at rock bottom. I was encouraged to volunteer and go to a confidence building course at a local centre. From that point I have never looked back. I now run the Meet a Mum Group with a fellow volunteer and new friend, and I am coming to the end of a Cache Level 2 Teaching Assistant course at college. The opportunities that the centre has offered me really have helped change mine and my family's life for the better."*

Rachel

*"I volunteer for a group who support people with learning disabilities. A few times a year the Just Good Friends Group runs a 'Night Club' event. The event is just for people with learning disabilities to attend a Night Club but in a safe environment. I help on the night with admission, making sure people are having fun and generally keeping an eye on things. I think I enjoy the night as much as everyone else. The night is so much fun, everyone is there to dance, sing, and laugh without being inhibited. There is always a big thank you at the end of the night, and even though I am thoroughly exhausted the next day through all the dancing it's too good a time to miss".*

Volunteer

*My husband and I had been trying for a baby, after years of facing life without a child, finally on our second IVF attempt we were going to have a baby. After our baby came along I never thought I would have a problem adjusting. I struggled with everything. I had a very supportive husband but was so lonely. I would walk into town every day just for something to do and couldn't bear to be on my own. I was diagnosed with post-natal depression in 2004. Then a ray of light entered my life, June, the then midwife from Sure Start, called round. She encouraged me to join the voluntary Babies, Babble and Bumps group and I haven't looked back. I attended numerous courses and after a year I became a volunteer at Meet-a-Mum and sit on the board. I now have a part-time job and still volunteer. Without Sure Start and volunteering my struggling would just have got worse, I have benefited so much from what was on offer and so has my daughter".*

Anne

## What the Organisation Says

Over 1.9 billion hours are given by volunteers each year to not-for-profit organisations; this is the equivalent to 1 million full-time workers. Below are examples of what it means to organisations to have the support of volunteers:

*"Volunteers fulfil important roles both in Leonard Cheshire Disability's services and in the organisation generally. Their support contributions enrich the daily lives of residents and service users, whether by sharing their talents, skills and interests, or merely through their company and friendship. Volunteers support residents and service users with many of the things they want to do, things that we often take for granted, such as accessing the local community to go shopping or swimming at a local leisure centre. Through the involvement of volunteers, a resident or service user may be able to share an interest, to learn a new skill, to campaign about an issue or to widen their social network by taking part in something they might not otherwise have the opportunity to do. Volunteers also help to provide welcome extras by raising funds or giving their time and effort to practical tasks for Leonard Cheshire Disability's services. Volunteers can, and do, really make a difference".*

Gillian Carpenter – Regional Volunteer Support Manager Eastern Region  
Leonard Cheshire Disability

*"RSPCA Derby and District is a self-funded branch of the national charity RSPCA. As a branch we need to raise our own funds to operate. We have a number of paid members of staff who run the shelter on day-to-day basis. Staff are supported by Volunteers who facilitate the work of the branch in various ways, which would not be possible had it not been for Volunteers. The support Volunteers give is of tremendous help and the best way to estimate the value of the time and skills they give would be by looking at what would not be in place had it not been for our Volunteers. We would not have a website, our dogs would not be walked regularly, we would not have a newsletter and the list goes on. Volunteers also help us fundraise. During the recent RSPCA Week, our Volunteers helped us raise £2250. We are very grateful for all the help, support and commitment we receive from our Volunteers".*

Asia Alder - Volunteer  
RSPCA Derby and District

*"Our Befriending Service is volunteer run and without volunteers the service would not be able to operate. All of our volunteers are fully committed, honest, trustworthy and reliable people who give their time to us. They are extremely valued members of our team and all their hard work is very much appreciated".*

Kim Clark – Manager  
Harlow Mind Befriending Service

*"RNIB has about 3,100 active volunteers on its books and around 2,300 paid members of staff, this means that around 57% of the people working for RNIB are volunteers - so we are very heavily reliant on volunteer input. We would not be able to deliver the quality and scope of service that we do if it weren't for volunteer contribution to RNIB. The volunteers who work with us are so important to us that we really want to make sure that they have an excellent and productive experience volunteering with us. For this reason, we have a National Volunteering Team, whose job is to support Volunteer Managers and to encourage and enable really high quality volunteer management. We do this by undertaking some of the administrative work of recruiting volunteers and by providing information, training and volunteer development and management resources for Volunteer Managers. For example, we have developed step-by-step training guides and training resources (a PowerPoint presentation; handouts; distance learning workbooks) for Volunteer*

*Managers to use to train their volunteers in Visual Awareness and Customer Care. We also act as consultants to Volunteer Managers on good practice in volunteer management and we develop policy and guidance on excellent volunteer management for our Volunteer Managers”.*

Amma Owusu-Atuahene – Volunteer Development Manager  
RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People)

## **Where to Go for Help**

There are many organisations offering support and advice for organisations involving volunteers, many of which are accessible via the Internet.

Examples of the support available are as follows:

<http://www.volunteering.org.uk> – Volunteering England offers advice and support on volunteer policies, employee-supported volunteering and legal issues. It is an independent voluntary agency committed to supporting, enabling and celebrating volunteering in all its diversity.

<http://www.doit.org.uk> – Doit.org.uk holds a national database of volunteering opportunities which is free for potential volunteers to access.

<http://www.navca.org.uk> – NAVCA is the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action and the national voice of local third sector infrastructure in England.

[http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third\\_sector.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector.aspx) - The Office of the Third Sector leads work across government to support the environment for a thriving third sector (voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, charities, cooperatives and mutuals), enabling the sector to campaign for change, deliver public services, promote social enterprise and strengthen communities.

<http://www.volresource.org.uk> - VolResource offer a quick and easy way to get to useful information on anything to do with running a voluntary organisation (whether a community group, charity or other non-profit body), via online links.