

The Volunteer Managers Handbook



**A guide to supporting volunteers for managers,
co-ordinators and leaders**

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Foreword

Volunteer managers “enable volunteers to make their full contribution to the organization’s goals whilst developing their own skills and interests.”

[The Management Standards Consultancy for the Voluntary Sector NTO]

In recent years, much effort has been put into raising the profile of volunteering. Volunteering has been promoted as the key to living a long and healthy life (Volunteering in Health and Social Care Report, March 2008), a stepping stone into work, and a way to rebuild communities. It sometimes seems though, that less thought has been given to the capacity of volunteer-involving groups and projects to recruit, lead, support and manage those volunteers effectively.

Managing, co-ordinating and leading volunteer-based projects has become increasingly professional, and rightly so. Anyone giving their time as a volunteer should have the right to know that they will be safe, supported and cared for, and those managing volunteers deserve recognition for their professional skills.

The down-side to this increasingly professional profile is the perceived mountain of paperwork and red tape facing those working with volunteers today. The National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Volunteer Management is 270 pages long. This in itself, highlights the diverse demands and facets of co-ordinating volunteers. For some organizations, particularly those that are volunteer-led, the ‘bureaucracy’ can seem insurmountable.

I hope that this handbook, whilst not a panacea for all the challenges facing volunteer managers, will at least offer some support and guidance for those working in the sector (both as paid and unpaid volunteer managers). The contents reflect the principles of the NOS, but intentionally focus on the hard skills and practical knowledge needed when you are working with volunteers, rather than the more generic ‘soft skills’.

The handbook has been devised to serve as a learning resource and a work of reference, with exercises, case studies, guidance and sources of information. I hope it will prove useful to those new to the role of managing volunteers and to those with experience. This book is primarily aimed at more formal volunteering opportunities. For many smaller, community-based, voluntary groups, implementing all the best practice approaches for managing volunteers could be 'mission impossible', but we hope that "The Volunteer Manager's Handbook" has some achievable ideas and valuable information for all volunteer-based projects.

Nicky McCrudden

It should be noted that any reference to legislation covering volunteering was correct at the time of publication.

Acknowledgement

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One: Introduction

This chapter takes a birds-eye view of the volunteering sector before considering the type of people who volunteer – their expectations, motivations, needs and skills - and then considers some of the factors that stop people volunteering.

As a volunteer manager, understanding what type of volunteer will be attracted to an opportunity is the first step in effective recruitment. Making assumptions about why people volunteer, or not even considering a volunteer's motivations are mistakes that will affect your ability to both recruit and retain them.

This chapter will encourage you to consider why people would give their time freely to your project, and will help you explore some of the barriers that organizations can inadvertently place in the way of potential volunteers.

The sector

People volunteer in all sorts of contexts. They can volunteer for statutory agencies such as local authorities, county councils, the police or NHS trusts and they can volunteer for not-for-profit groups such as national and local charities or community groups like sports clubs. Volunteering can be formal with a group or organization, or informal – keeping an eye on an older person who lives nearby, for example. Volunteering England reports that approximately 90 million hours of formal volunteering takes place weekly and that the economic value of that volunteering is around £40 billion per year.

Accurate data on volunteer-involving organizations is difficult to obtain because there is no single register. Many, but not all, are not-for-profit organizations which means that any profit made cannot be paid to individuals, but must be put into the organizations reserves, which in turn means that there is less need to register with a regulatory agency. The Charity Commission holds an ever-expanding list of charitable organizations, but not all volunteer-involving groups are registered. Many small community-based groups such as befriending schemes and local sports clubs, either do not view themselves as charities per se, or do not see the need to register.

The UK Voluntary Sector Almanacs 2006 and 2007, reported that:

- The not-for-profit sector has been expanding since 1991
- The majority of groups in the sector are smaller community-based groups, but over half have an income of less than £10,000 per annum
- As a result of the ever-increasing number of charities the sector's income has been rising in recent years, but incomes for each organization are more likely to be falling or remaining the same year-on-year.
- Although the not-for-profit sector is the only sector that receives voluntary income in the form of grants and donations, earned income is increasing in the sector. Income from donations is now most likely to be matched by selling goods or services; known as social enterprise.

- The number of people employed in the sector has dramatically increased from 483,000 employees in 1996 to 611,000 in 2005, and almost 40% of those workers are part-time. Voluntary and community groups employ more women (69% of the workforce) than men.

As for volunteer managers – around 84% of volunteer managers are in paid roles within the sector, but managing volunteers is usually a part of a broader job or role. There are very few people whose role is exclusively ‘managing volunteers’.

Volunteers – worth their weight in gold

Volunteers can be so motivated and committed to a cause that they will turn up for ‘work’ come rain or shine, even though they are not being paid. The right volunteer recruited to the right role, and looked after well will not only be a motivated team member, but also a sterling advocate for your organization.

The traditional view of the volunteer as a retired person with a life-time of experience and time on their hands is slowly changing. There is a growing trend for younger people to be involved in volunteering and the 2005 Citizenship Survey suggested that 63% of 16-19 year olds volunteered at least once in twelve months, compared to 48% aged 50-64 years, and 50% of those aged 65-74.

It is difficult to have a single definition of a volunteer because not everyone who volunteers does so in the same way. Some people volunteer regularly with the same organization for years on end, others volunteer on an ad-hoc basis at events, and there are those who become a volunteer for just a short period of time.

One broad way to categorize volunteers is shown in the diagram below:

Stepping Stone Volunteers have reached a turning point in their lives. They may be looking to return to work after a period of unemployment or ill health or they may be a student looking for experience for a CV. Whatever the reason, they see volunteering as stepping stone en route to their ultimate goal

Stalwart Volunteers have a strong psychological investment to your organization's aims and objectives. They are very dedicated, passionate about your cause and volunteering is part of their identity. These are the type of volunteers who commit to a group long-term. In volunteer-led volunteering groups they are often the people that lead the project with their drive and passion.

Project Hopper Volunteers move from one organization to another volunteering for limited periods. The classic example of this is a parent who volunteers while their children are involved in a particular sport or activity. Volunteering, and 'helping out' could be part of this person's mind set, but they'll probably enjoy short-term commitments on different projects.

As a volunteer manager, there is value in learning to recognise these different 'types' of volunteer, as they often benefit from slightly different management approaches. Knowing where a volunteer is 'coming from' can help a manager match them with the best role within a project. For example, a permanent role that requires a lot of input from a volunteer might not appeal to a Project Hopper, but might be well suited to a Stalwart and even a Stepping Stone Volunteer looking for that type of experience. Knowing the 'type' of volunteer you are working with may also influence the way you recognize their achievements. A Stepping Stone volunteer is likely to value certificates, awards and the offer of a reference to support their transition into a new life whilst it is not unknown for Stalwart volunteers to be offended by the offer of this type of external reward as theirs is a more intrinsic motivation see chapter 8.

Volunteer 'type' often influences the end of a volunteering relationship too. Stepping Stones are less likely to be with your project long-term. Once they

have met their specific need, they may well move on. This is not a reflection on the organization or the volunteer manager – but do plan ahead for it. You will need to be ready to recruit to replace them one day. It is helpful to remember however that these categories are not set in stone, or mutually exclusive. An individual may be a Stalwart volunteer with one organization, but also a Project Hopper with other groups. A Stepping Stone Volunteer may become a long-term supporter if they are valued and treated well.

Individual motivations

Within these broad categories volunteers will have a great many specific, but different, reasons for getting involved.

Lisa's story will be familiar to many volunteer-based groups that provide services or activities for children. Lisa's youngest child had just started pre-school, and after the first week or so, she was accosted by one of the other parents looking for new members of the trustee committee. Not liking to say no too quickly, Lisa hesitated and was instantly 'signed-up'. In her heart she thought it was probably a good idea after all she was making sure the pre-school ran well for the sake of her daughter, and it wasn't really a big commitment. In essence, Lisa's motivation for volunteering, was to ensure a service existed for her daughter. There are many other reasons people give for becoming a volunteer:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| meet new people | learn new skills |
| develop my CV | a route into work |
| committed to the cause | get recognition |
| use existing skills | fulfil an un-met need |
| because of a family member | give something back / do good |
| time on my hands | be part of a team |
| to get unique opportunities | build my confidence |
| experience something new | personal growth |
| have fun | sense of identity |

Allan Luks, the author of “The Healing Power of Doing Good”, provides evidence that suggests volunteering is just plain good for your health!

As a volunteer manager, knowing what motivates people is crucial in promoting your opportunity to potential volunteers, recruiting them to a role that can give them what they are looking for, managing their expectations and keeping them interested. But remember, motivation to a volunteer is not a fixed state; it can change over time. It did for Lisa. After two months the trustee committee’s secretary stood down and Lisa took over the administration for them. She found she enjoyed the new challenge and her motivation shifted to learning skills to help her find a job. Sadly, no-one picked up on that shift in her reason for volunteering, and without the support she really wanted, Lisa stopped enjoying her volunteering and stood down.

Making the effort to find out why an individual wants to volunteer is time well spent. It is one of the most important questions to ask when recruiting potential volunteers (Chapter 3), and it is crucial that you monitor it during supervision (Chapter 7).

If volunteering is so great – why aren’t we all doing it?

Just like Lisa, when volunteering is suggested to most people, their immediate and natural reaction is to rule themselves out – “*they won’t be looking for someone like me*”. There are a variety of practical and psychological barriers that people put in the way of getting involved in volunteer work. Some are real, some are imagined. Organizations typically focus on tackling the practical issues; but research suggests that the psychological barriers are seen as more challenging to the potential volunteer. As a volunteer manager, one of your roles is to identify ALL the potential barriers to getting involved in your project. The National Occupational Standards for volunteer management highlight “reducing barriers to volunteering” as a key role for managers. Sometimes that might be as simple as helping potential volunteers see that these issues need not be a problem. Here are some of the most common barriers to volunteering and some ways to remove them:

Barrier

Volunteer managers can...

"I don't have enough time"

- Confirm the perception of the time involved. Include an estimated time involvement in publicity - but do not stipulate a minimum number of hours (see Chapter 2)
- Be flexible – consider short-term volunteering, working from home, arranging hours to suit the volunteer, splitting roles, or using a rota

"I don't want to be labelled a do-gooder" or "I'm not 'that' kind of person".

- Think carefully about the language used and images portrayed in your advertising and recruitment literature.
- Make sure your organization's volunteers reflect the make-up of your local community by actively seeking to recruit a diverse range of volunteers (see chapter 4).
- Emphasize the benefits that volunteers can get from joining your organization. Use existing volunteers as advocates (see Chap 3)

"I don't have the right skills"

- Highlight training opportunities (see Chapter 5) or get quotations from other volunteers about the skills they have learned since joining you.

"The recruitment process

- Make sure that applications and

puts me off, I don't like forms"

information are available in a variety of formats and support is available.

- Make the recruitment process as informal as possible.
- Ensure that you only ask potential volunteers for information that is relevant and necessary to the role.

"I'm not interested now my child is not involved"

- Try to continue the engagement at a time when the child is occupied doing whatever they have gone on to do.
- Re-negotiate: offer the chance to stay on for a short-term basis or to volunteer for specific events.
- Try and ensure that parent-volunteers get something from volunteering beyond supporting their child (see chapter 8)

"I receive state benefits and I'm worried that volunteering might affect the benefits that I get"

- Be aware of the rules on volunteering and benefits. For more information about volunteering whilst on benefits visit www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

"I'm worried about having to have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check"

- Make clear exactly when criminal checks are necessary for volunteers (see Chapter 6).
- Be clear that the checks are to protect all concerned, including the volunteer
- Make sure the project has an appropriate policy about the recruitment of ex-offenders and that it is given to any potential volunteers along with the application form.

Today's volunteer managers have a lot of responsibility in their organizations. Most of them are not full-time volunteer managers – it is just one part of another role. When you have recruitment worries and are concerned about the legalities of working with volunteers spending time getting to know them can seem like a fairly low priority. However, most grass-roots services only exist because of volunteers and volunteers are people with their own motivations and needs. Making an effort to uncover and support those needs is one easy way to prolong volunteering relationships; or at the very least ensure that when your volunteers leave you they tell everyone they know how great volunteering for you is!



Exercise:

1. *Think about the people who volunteer for your organization. Make a note of the characteristics of each.*
2. *What 'types' of volunteers seem to be attracted to your organization?*
3. *Why do you think that is?*
4. *Do you need to do something about this?*