

## **Managing volunteers**

Volunteer management is a topic often overlooked by many organisations once they have managed to involve some volunteers in their work. If care and attention isn't devoted to the volunteers and their work then they can become demotivated and the experience of volunteering can become a negative one for all involved. In order to avoid this it is important that volunteers are valued and managed properly by the organisation they are working with. Below are some tips and ideas about how to effectively manage your organisation's volunteers.

### **1. Recruitment**

Volunteers may be recruited because of their general interest in voluntary work or from a specific interest in the purpose of an organisation. Perhaps the key task in recruiting new people is to actively sell the benefits (both to the individual and the organisation) of being a volunteer, stressing how volunteering can make a real and significant difference to your organisation.

Here are some ideas about what to include in advertising material.

- A description of the work volunteers actually do;
- What work the organisation as a whole does;
- How a new volunteer can make a significant contribution to the work of your organisation;
- How volunteering can make a difference to the community;
- Benefits of volunteering to the potential volunteer.
- How to find out more and what to do next.

This information can be used in various ways to attract new volunteers:

- Put up posters in the local area, advertising for volunteers;
- Use social media – website, Facebook, twitter and Streetlife (we can also use our website and twitter account to promote your volunteer role);
- Place an ad in the local newspaper or use events and special occasions to get coverage from local press and radio (community newsletters, letters to the editor, church magazines, local radio);
- Get existing volunteers, paid staff or clients to tell their friends word of mouth often works well as an effective form of recruitment;
- Give a talk or presentation to a targeted audience such as schools, colleges, local employers, job clubs, etc.

Potential volunteers may express concerns and fears about working in situations which are unfamiliar, new, or challenging. Addressing these issues will help to clarify what is involved in volunteering and reassure people about their ability to do the work. Here are some suggestions about how to deal with these concerns.

Have one to one discussions or informal interviews with volunteers as a way of finding out more about the work without making a definite commitment.

- Stress that no previous experience is necessary if this is appropriate and accurate;
- Emphasise that full training will be given before volunteers are expected to carry out any voluntary work;
- Offer a trial period that allows volunteers to try out the work without committing themselves fully.

## **2. Induction**

Once volunteers have been accepted into the organisation, a good way of getting things started is to have an induction session in which volunteers are introduced to the organisation. Induction is a formal opportunity for new volunteers to ask questions about the organisation, clarify their role and find out what is involved. Good induction should help a volunteer feel part of the organisation and begin to develop a sense of commitment to it.

Induction should include an overview of the work of the organisation, provide information about the aims of the project, the work or services involved and an opportunity to meet other paid workers and volunteers. Induction can be organised in a variety of ways, including on a one to one or group basis. Induction on a group basis, if there are enough volunteers and resources to do this, is particularly useful as it enables new volunteers to get to know each other, build a sense of team spirit and develop supportive relationships.

It is a good idea to put together an induction pack so that new volunteers can have all the information they need. An induction pack could include a volunteer policy, volunteer agreement, voluntary work outline, equal opportunities policy, health and safety policy, information on expenses, etc.

## **3. Training**

Volunteers should be provided with all the training they need in order to carry out their role. If the task is quite demanding or specialised then there will be a need to have some specific training sessions before the volunteers can carry out their work. Having clear and simple voluntary work outlines (see Volunteer Policy Factsheet) will help in identifying training needs. A training programme can then be produced to develop the skills and qualities that are needed to carry out the work. It will also be helpful to identify any on-going training needs that volunteers may have so that training programmes can be developed to facilitate volunteers progress in the organisation.

#### **4. Support and Supervision**

Regular opportunities for support and supervision are important and can help to identify and even prevent overload and burnout, which often results in them leaving the organisation. Good supervision develops the skills of an individual volunteer and seeks to enhance the quality of service the organisation can offer. It is vital that volunteers are adequately supported in their role and that they are genuinely enabled to deal with the demands of their voluntary work. It is also important that volunteers receive regular feedback on the effectiveness of their work so that any issues can be dealt with as they arise.

The format and regularity of support and supervision will depend on the type of voluntary work people are involved in. This can be provided through a one to one arrangement with a line manager, or a named buddy or mentor who could be a more experienced volunteer, available to discuss work related issues in confidence. Support and supervision could also be provided on a group basis which is often more cost effective. Group supervision also has the additional benefits of enabling volunteers to experience a variety of views on the issues being discussed.

It is important that attention is given to having a supportive and safe environment for regular review meetings with volunteers.

#### **5. Motivation, Retention and Recognition of Volunteers**

Once volunteers are working within the organisation it is essential to maintain their motivation and enthusiasm if they are to be retained. Care must be taken to treat volunteers in such a way that they will want to stay with the organisation. Developing activities that meet volunteers individual needs, provide recognition and appreciation of their work and celebrate a sense of achievement will promote self-esteem, strengthen commitment and develop a feeling of belonging and loyalty to the organisation.

Some of the issues that need very careful consideration are:

- Regular opportunities to learn new skills;
- Sense of personal achievement and contribution to the work of the organisation;
- Making a difference to other people's lives, the wider community or environment;
- Social needs and making new friends;
- Having access to new and different experiences including other forms of voluntary work
- Volunteer appreciation and thanks.

Designing volunteer roles and flexible systems that address these issues and provide volunteers with good quality induction, training and support is a complex challenge and yet this is the pay back that volunteers increasingly expect from their organisations.