

Voluntary Action-**Leeds** Volunteer Recruitment

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RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

Recruiting volunteers is not the first step for an organisation to take after the decision to involve them has been made. Before recruitment it is important to:-

- decide why they are needed,
- ensure there are sufficient resources
- assign responsibility to a supervisor/manager
- develop effective selection, induction, training and support practices.

These are the foundations for a volunteer programme. Recruitment, as with other areas of volunteer management, requires careful planning and organisations should work towards forming a strategy.

What issues are there to consider?

For any organisation, presenting a good image of themselves is vital to their effectiveness, reputation and success. Promoting its work, why it needs to be done, the people being helped and so on, are all part of the awareness-raising process. Attracting would-be volunteers should also be central to this public relations effort. Some organisations do have a tendency for seeking too much 'good' publicity, e.g. pictures of workers (management) shaking hands with politicians/celebrities/royalty which can raise the status of the organisation, but gives prospective volunteers little idea as to how they might fit in. Effective publicity should combine the high profile achievements with news about the day-to-day activities of grass roots volunteers.

Local communities are often a valuable source of volunteers, therefore, consider the people who live and work around the organisation. An organisation should endeavour to build rapport with local people. Regular invitations to suitable events can be a useful way of 'breaking the ice' and enable people to understand why the organisation exists. Recruiting volunteers is much easier when people already have some idea what the organisation does, especially if it is viewed positively.

Conducting local research and liaising with others -'networking' -is time well spent. It will be useful to find out which issues face other volunteer-recruiting organisations in the area. Opportunities may also arise for joint recruitment campaigns. The local Volunteer Bureau is (probably) the organisation best placed to give an overview of the local volunteer market and, as such, is a good starting point.

Before an organisation decides how it will recruit volunteers, there needs to be clarity regarding the recruitment messages it wants to convey. A recruitment message has to make an impact by appealing to people's interest and sense of community as well as encouraging them to find out more on how they can contribute. Basically, there will be two strands to any recruitment publicity firstly, information on the type of work carried out by the organisation and secondly, what involvement volunteers will have. It is important to provide enough information for potential volunteers to make an informed choice while emphasising the benefits of volunteering.

Organisations with access to the right technology have the opportunity to develop high-quality, creative pieces of publicity reasonably cheaply. It is feasible for individuals with the necessary IT skills to produce pictures with text in a variety of fonts/sizes in a relatively short time. Another possibility is to forge links with local colleges which have students undertaking art/design/graphics/publicity type courses. A piece of work such as a leaflet or poster can act as an assignment for the student as well as recruitment and/or publicity for the organisation.

In short, giving a small but relevant amount of information, in an imaginative format, is often the most effective way of getting across a recruitment message. The following is a basic guide of what areas to include.

Relevant Information

- the aims of the organisation
- the type of work carried out
- the client/user group and their issues
- when/where the work takes place
- how volunteers can help
- why volunteers are needed
- details of training provided
- expectations (qualifications/experience)
- expenses/insurance cover
- clear contact details

Benefits to Volunteers

- sense of doing something worthwhile
- satisfaction of achievement
- contributing to other's well-being
- opportunity to learn new skills
- opportunity to develop existing skills
- increase one's knowledge/awareness
- a break from home
- chance to meet new people
- good use of one's spare time
- personal fulfilment

There are various ways to get volunteers, whichever route is taken it is advisable to **plan a recruitment campaign**. The most effective way is, generally, by word-of-mouth and it is unlikely any other single method will attract as many positive responses. Most organisations though find it necessary to use various approaches in order to get their message across. A recruitment campaign, therefore, can be rather like a marketing exercise. Firstly, an organisation has to decide what it is about them and their work that will attract people and secondly, find the most effective way of telling potential volunteers. This is considerably easier for well-known organisations with a 'good' public image, however, if that is not the case raising the profile of an organisation and promoting its work is a vitally important task and one which needs to be tackled effectively.

The Plan

1. Begin with the organisation. Get everyone involved (trustees, workers, volunteers and users) to think of as many things as they can about the organisation, which they feel may attract people. A list placing ideas in order of priority can be compiled, hopefully, there will be a number of points on which everyone agrees are the main aspects of the organisation and its work. This exercise highlights, at the very least, that in order to 'sell' the organisation, the 'sales people' themselves need to be clear with regard to what may make it attractive to volunteers.

2. An organisation must know precisely **why** it wants volunteers. What work will they do? When? Why? Where? Who? These questions need constant clarification and review (see paper '**Should volunteers be involved in the organisation?**').
3. Consider developing job descriptions and person specifications (see paper '**Selecting Volunteers**') and try to use them as a template for recruiting volunteers.
4. Related to this is the question of targeting. Keep in mind not only the type of volunteers required but also the number. If two volunteer counsellors are needed then producing, say, 5000 flyers for door-to-door delivery is inappropriate. Surely it would be more effective to contact an organisation where counsellors can be found.
5. The organisation needs to ensure it does not place unnecessary 'barriers' for prospective volunteers. Volunteering should be open to all sections of the community.

The table 'Barriers to Volunteering' notes these concerns and how to address them. Positive action is about creating a climate of equal access in which everyone feels they can participate. It means recognising some groups (e.g. those from black communities, disabled people etc.) are disadvantaged as far as volunteering is concerned. In order to bridge the gap, there may well be a need for extra effort including a greater understanding of the issues, working with ethnic communities, specialist training and specific targeting when recruiting volunteers.

How can volunteers be recruited?

The chart on 'Action Plan for Recruitment' gives a range of potential sources for finding volunteers, while 'Advantages/ Disadvantages' looks at some of the issues associated with using various approaches. There is no secret formula and certain methods will prove more effective than others. There are also pitfalls to avoid.

Recruit through personal contacts.

Word of mouth proves to be the most productive source of volunteers. Repeatedly, studies have shown the main reason for people not volunteering is, quite simply, because they are not asked! Events, such as open days/evenings, provide an ideal opportunity to attract prospective volunteers. Often when people see the work that goes on and can meet and talk with clients/users, existing volunteers etc., they may well feel a desire to volunteer.

One possible drawback of finding volunteers through personal contacts is people can often tend to recruit others who are 'similar' to themselves, i.e. similar views, social

status, same ethnicity, locality, age, gender and so on. This is not always necessarily bad practice but it can lead to inadvertent discrimination and may exclude those from outside certain circles.

Targeting.

As noted above this is an extension of the personal contact approach. It means thinking about the type of volunteers wanted and how many, and then targeting the most appropriate places to get them. So, if older volunteers are needed, do not go to a youth club! Again, however, there is the pitfall of always recruiting the 'same type' of volunteer and forming a clique.

Generic recruitment includes posters, leaflets, tv, radio, press, careers service, schools/colleges/universities, job centres, volunteer bureaux, churches, in fact anywhere where volunteers may be found!

Of course there can be cross over between any or all of these approaches (for example, a radio broadcast can be made with specific groups of people in mind) and for many organisations recruitment is very much trial and error.