

Voluntary Action-**Leeds** Volunteer Training

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TRAINING VOLUNTEERS

Increasingly, providing adequate and appropriate training for volunteers is a key element of good practice for organisations. As with all other aspects of working with volunteers, issues need to be carefully thought through and planned. The purpose of this paper is to outline some of the reasons why organisations should train volunteers. It will also highlight concerns that need to be addressed before volunteers are recruited and cover aspects of planning for those responsible for co-ordinating the training. This final area looks not only at the 'aims' and 'objectives' of training but also the practical hurdles which need to be overcome.

Why is there a need to train volunteers?

The fundamental reason for training volunteers is to improve their effectiveness in achieving tasks and, therefore, meeting the needs of those they are working for. Training should, in theory, enable volunteers to develop skills, examine attitudes and gain further knowledge regarding the work of the organisation. It can also provide a forum for exploring ideas and sharing experiences. Many organisations, for example, rely on volunteers to provide services which often call for particular skills (counselling, advocacy, advice, befriending and so on) and, as such, volunteers need to be equipped to do this. Organisations, for their part, must have a clear understanding of how they are going to make this happen.

There are several further reasons for training volunteers: -

- Motivation (and maintaining it)
- Training may enable volunteers to feel valued
- Opportunity to give information and cover practical issues
- Opportunity to introduce new ideas / legislation etc.
- Training, if given to all, shows consistency within the organisation
- It may also enable a consistent delivery of service within the organisation
- Enables a group of people to get to know one another
- Enables team building / co-support
- May improve the way people work / enable job satisfaction
- Enables skills, knowledge and experience to be learned and developed
- Enables volunteers to contribute their skills, knowledge and experience
- A means of support
- It may be required by a service level agreement or other type of contract

- Demonstrates a level of quality assurance
- It may be necessary to meet insurance requirements

Training also has a role concerning Equal Opportunities. If organisations relied on, or expected, volunteers to already have the skills to do the job, many people would be denied a volunteering opportunity simply because they would not have had a chance to develop those skills. By providing training organisations open the door to a much wider range of people.

Having a training programme is one way of attracting potential volunteers. It demonstrates that work carried out by volunteers is taken seriously and the provision of a training course can instil confidence in those seeking voluntary work. Many people see training as a means of gaining new skills, while others view it as a step towards higher education, further training and qualifications, especially if the training on offer is accredited, e.g. an NVQ. It is important to be aware that training is not just seen as a means to an end.

Consider the following quotes by volunteers about training:-

'It gives me freedom to make mistakes in a safe environment', 'I know my contribution is valued', 'I can develop skills and knowledge relevant to my job', 'It increased motivation when I returned to work', 'It's an opportunity to apply knowledge and skills gained', 'It helps me see my role in a different light', ('Working with Volunteers- Training', Lisa Conway, The National Centre for Volunteering 1994).

Are there other issues for organisations to consider?

Before taking the necessary steps to begin planning training for volunteers, there are issues and concerns which need to be addressed.

- a) It is useful to differentiate between what is **essential** for volunteers – 'core training' and 'specific training' which is specialised, extra or optional. Core training should include:
 - Mission statement / aims and objectives of the organisation
 - Structure / history of organisation / information on client group
 - Staffing (introductions, roles and responsibilities)
 - Policies (e.g. health & safety, disciplinary/grievance, HIV/Aids etc.) tasks of volunteers Job description / personal specification)
 - Practical issues (claiming expenses, emergency procedures, access etc.)
 - Confidentiality
 - Issues of equal opportunities

- Information or guidance on what support is available for volunteers
- b) It is preferable to involve volunteers when planning additional training. This enables the organisation to focus on the training needs of volunteers instead of making assumptions. It may also make volunteers feel more valued and lessens the risk of patronising them or devaluing their existing skills.
- c) Specific training is mainly concerned with enabling volunteers to do specific tasks and not trying to turn them into 'semi-professionals'.
- d) Training and training needs, ideally, should be periodically reviewed. This may include individual and/or group review sessions, which can be formal or informal. Reviews often provide an arena for identifying further training needs of volunteers.
- e) Consider 'on the job' training. It is reasonable to suggest, for example, that issues around confidentiality need to be looked at in a formal setting, however, showing someone how to use a photocopier can be done as and when the task arises.
- f) Organisations need to budget for training. This will include costs for hiring trainers, the venue, equipment and money for refreshments and volunteers' expenses.
- g) Training may affect funding (e.g. funding is determined by the number of volunteers trained and providing the service).
- h) Training may affect insurance (e.g. if volunteers are not trained they may not be covered and therefore they, or the organisation, may be liable for any claims made against them)
- i) Give consideration to providing equal access to training opportunities. Issues to consider are access, location, venue, transport, times, environment etc.
- j) Training can be part of a selection process and as such may enable the volunteer and/or organisation to decide whether or not they wish to continue.
- k) Organisations need to be clear regarding training volunteers and paid workers - should volunteers undergo the same level of training as paid workers, for example?
- l) Decide when it may be appropriate to begin a training course. If there are a couple of volunteers waiting to be trained, how long can they be kept waiting? It may be beneficial for organisations working in related fields to do joint training.

- m) Consider the size of a group. If there are, say, twenty or more volunteers can they be trained effectively or might it be best to split them into smaller groups?
- n) Consider inviting members of the management committee to do at least the basic training.
- o) A system for recording and evaluating training for each volunteer needs to be put in place, in case any future problems arise with insurance, health and safety etc.

What about volunteers who show a resistance to training?

From time to time prospective volunteers will show resistance when being asked to do training. They may feel genuinely frightened at the prospect of training, perhaps fearing they will be asked something which they are unable to answer. The word 'training' itself can make some people uneasy as it may hold different connotations. Times arranged for training may clash with a volunteer's work or there might be child care issues or other time restrictions. And, do not forget, there are also those people who believe 'they know it all'!

If resistance to training is encountered, there may be certain approaches to take: -

- Use alternative words e.g. information day, coffee mornings etc.
- Be understanding but encouraging, acknowledge skills and attributes
- Explain how they will be able to make a positive contribution to the training
- Enable volunteers to be involved in setting up training sessions
- Value them as individuals and the help they are giving the organisation

The remaining sections of this paper focus on the more practical considerations concerned with training volunteers.

TRAINING - PLANNING A PROGRAMME

(This is one suggestion but by no means the only way!)

Say what is the organisation aiming to achieve.

The organisation should be clear about what it wants to achieve through training volunteers!

List the general training aims of the organisation.

For example these could include enabling participants to:

- Have an overview of the work of the organisation.
- Gain a basic knowledge of 'the subject matter'.
- Learn new skills, techniques, methods or develop existing ones.
- Cover specific subjects / issues (e.g. confidentiality; equal opportunities).
- Raise levels of awareness in all aspects of the work.
- Cover the practicalities (i.e. health & safety; claiming expenses; insurance) .

Decide 'aims' and 'objectives'.

It could be argued that setting aims and objectives for a training programme should, if possible, be a joint undertaking between the organisation and those participating in the course. This consultation can take place through discussion, completion of application forms, questionnaires etc., in conjunction with doing a 'training needs analysis' relating to the tasks and roles of prospective volunteers.

a) The 'aims' are the overall purpose for running the training course. For example, a course for new volunteers might have as an aim.

"To prepare volunteers to work for in a way that will be effective for the organisation, its clients and meets the needs of volunteers. "

b) The 'objectives' need to be more specific: (ideally, these will state what skills, knowledge or awareness the participant should have, and to what standard, by the end of the training. So, for example, the first two objectives for new volunteers to meet, may be to)

'List the range of resources available to the organisation. , 'Be aware of who to ask for help and support'

'Objectives' are generally set to meet the needs of both organisation and volunteers. Consider ways of achieving 'objectives'.

This could be done by listing as many exercises as can be thought of which might help to achieve the objectives. Taking one objective at a time may prove the most effective way of tackling this.

However, while doing this consider the following

- a) Consider the level at which to pitch the training. What prior knowledge / skills do the participants have? Do not assume!!!
- b) Consider the size of the group of volunteer trainees.

A large group (16 or more) could hinder active participation and therefore it may be appropriate to have two or more groups.

Choose which exercises seem most suitable.

Check the combination of exercises that have been chosen. (and then consider the following points)

- a) Ensure there are a variety of activities. People learn in different ways and by keeping exercises varied and interesting, participants will gain more from the training.
- b) Consider how realistic the activities are. If there is 15 minutes available to do an exercise try to ensure it can be done in this time (try it out beforehand!).
- c) Is there a combination of larger and smaller group work? How will groups be divided up?
- d) Will everyone have an equal opportunity to participate?
- e) Is the degree of challenge appropriate to the groups stage of development? Endeavour to be sensitive and non-threatening, while still offering the participants a challenge. No-one said training was easy!
- f) Consider timing. Is there too much to cram into the course, or too little? If it is felt there is too much, think about what can be left out. Also look at allowing time for breaks (tea/coffee/lunch) and try to make these at appropriate times (e.g. after an exercise and not half-way through it).
- g) The beginning of the event is very important. As the saying goes, there is only one chance to make a first impression. So try to get people's interest from the start of the session.
- h) A session also needs to finish on a positive note, therefore: -

- Ensure there is not highly emotive material towards the end, unless there is time for people to 'debrief and deal with their feelings.
 - Try and ensure people have time to reflect on what they have earned and, if applicable, plan future action.
 - Make sure there is 'feedback' time for the trainer/facilitator.
 - Thank the group for attending, congratulate them and let people know that if anyone needs to discuss any issue, this can be done either at the end or a future appointment can be made.
- i) Look back over the original list of 'aims' and 'objectives'. How well were they covered? Will they have to be revised? Are there better/different ways of achieving the objectives?
- j) Check to see if training covers what the volunteers need/asked for. If in doubt, ask! Make a final decision on the programme.
- Draft an outline programme for participants.
 - Write detailed notes for yourself (and other trainers). The more detailed the better.
 - Ensure that explanations of the objectives for each session are available for participants.

Monitoring and Evaluation.

There needs to be a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating sessions to enable those delivering the training to ascertain how effective it has been and, if necessary, where improvements can be made.

Structure & Timetable.

If training is to run over several sessions a format and timetable should be drawn up.

Consider what materials will be needed.

A tick list is a good idea (see '**Training - Equipment Needed**' for further guidelines).

Consider the style and presentation.

Trainers need to decide on style and delivery (see '**Training -Techniques**' for further guidelines).

Ensure the trainer has previous knowledge of materials. If there are to be handouts and/or videos the trainer should have some prior knowledge of them and know how to operate any equipment.

Consider the venue.

This is very important. Look at the venue and keep in mind specific needs (see '**Training -Choosing a Venue**' for further guidelines).

Plan well ahead.

a) If dates for training have been set or are limited, does this leave enough time for preparation?

b) Endeavour to notify participants well in advance and ensure they are given sufficient details (e.g. date, time, venue, a map, bus numbers etc.).

- c) Be flexible and have a contingency plan in case of cancellations.
- d) Think about how the training course will be promoted.

TRAINING -THE DAY OF THE SESSION

Arrive well ahead of time!!!

Check out all the facilities, services and venue to ensure all is in order.

Ensure that everything is satisfactory:

- The layout of the room and seating arrangement
- That all the facilities are in working order (e.g. lighting, power, heaters, kettle!). If a projector is being used remember an extension cable (and spare bulb).
- Are there are sufficient pens, flipchart paper and 'Blu-Tack'?
- Others are aware that the building / room is being used for a training session.
- There is a contingency plan for contacting people in an emergency.
- There are sufficient refreshments (e.g. tea, coffee, milk, sugar, biscuits, etc.).
- Ensure that materials used for displaying (flipcharts, projector screens etc.) can be seen by all participants.

Remember to take facilitators notes.

The person undertaking the training may well have their own notes, cue cards or prompts to enable them to keep the session structured and ensure that all the points are covered.

Be clear about the programme/session. The trainer should have a clear idea regarding how the session will be introduced and of the timetable for the day (i.e. what time breaks will be). If the session is to be broken down into discussions / feedback / watching videos, for example, the trainer needs to aware of time restraints and therefore have time-managed the days programme.

Ensure that the person who is undertaking the training is there to greet the participants.

Some trainees are likely to be a little anxious, so seeing a welcoming face of someone they know may help them to feel more at ease.

To ensure that participants leave in a positive frame of mind the trainer needs to make time at the end of the session for answering questions and 'personal queries'.

Throughout, try to remain flexible, relaxed and responsive to the needs of the group.

Finally, remember (if applicable) to:

- Do the washing up!
- Take all materials with you!
- Check no-one is left in the building (especially the toilets)!
- Turn off the lights!
- Lock the doors and return the keys!

TRAINING - CHOOSING A VENUE

Both the venue itself and the room in which the meetings are held give messages about the kind of group the organisation is trying to form and what is expected of it. Of course, a prime factor is that of cost, but it is worth considering the particular messages concerned with ownership of the building and the status and neutrality of the organisation.

General considerations regarding choice of a venue.

- Size
- Possibilities for seating arrangement
- Disabled access
- Access for parking and public transport
- Heating, ventilation, absence of noise, adequate lighting
- Adequate electrical power supply for equipment; number of power points
- Facilities for using flipcharts, overhead projectors, audio-visual equipment etc.
- Facilities for installing any special equipment (e.g. an induction loop)
- Facilities for making tea/coffee/catering
- Cloakroom/toilets (including disabled toilets)

Check availability / cost of the venue.

- Does the venue need to be booked well in advance?
- Who is responsible for the opening/locking up? (Make friends with the caretaker!)
- Who needs to be contacted in an emergency and where?
- Who is responsible for receiving any payment for the venue?

The room

The way in which a room is set up will have a considerable impact on the group's initial behaviour. It could be argued that in their early stages, groups tend to conform to what they perceive to be the 'leaders' (i.e. trainer, tutor, facilitator, etc.) expectations, and the room itself may give the clearest message as to what these are. The main factors to consider are:

- The general 'tone' and style of the room

- Physical considerations (e.g. heating and ventilation)
- Access; consider disabled people and those who have impaired hearing or sight.
- The acoustics of the room
- The general facilities (listed above)
- The seating arrangement, arguably a (semi) circle is the most effective for groups
- How to focus interest and attention by ensuring distractions are minimised (for example, remove notes/flipcharts from any previous sessions and make sure everyone is able to see the visual displays)

TRAINING - INTRODUCING THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

It could be argued that the beginning of a training programme is a crucial stage of the volunteer process. Whether the training programme is made up of a number of sessions or is a 'one off' event, it is important to plan the introductory stage carefully. The reasons for this are:

- To establish the purpose of the session / event -to set the tone and atmosphere
- To enable participants to be introduced (trainers and trainees)
- To enable the participants to focus on the training and be motivated
- To give participants a sense of belonging, while preparing them to tackle the training topics

At the start of most training events the trainer(s) will be expected to take the lead and initiate the proceedings. If this role is not carried out effectively the participants may well lose confidence in the trainer which in turn could undermine their 'credibility'. There is no one ideal way to deliver a session and trainers should try and adopt a style they feel most comfortable but if the 'chosen' style is inappropriate, an aware trainer should recognise this and adapt accordingly!

In order to make the introduction run as smoothly as possible, it may be useful to bear in mind the following:

- The physical arrangement of the room; if the trainer places the participants behind desks or tables this can create a school-type atmosphere with barriers between trainer and volunteers
- Appropriate introductions; people need to have some idea of who they are working with and it is also often useful to know a little background information. There are a number of ways (often known as 'ice-breakers') to enable participants to introduce themselves to the group.