

Working with volunteers

When organising an event, people's time is a valuable resource and is expensive to buy. Have you thought about finding volunteers to work on your event? Many local enthusiasts are keen to be involved in organising events, which are of particular interest to them. A music lover, for example, would happily steward at a music festival if it means they get to see all the concerts free of charge.

Volunteers can fulfill all kinds of roles, but can be particularly good at dealing with the public – directing them to their seats, answering any queries, and generally helping them to have a better experience at the event. If you are lucky, you can build up a team of volunteers who will work at your event year after year, and will also help to promote it simply by being enthusiastic.

Recruitment

Even if your team includes paid staff, using volunteers at all levels is always useful. Recruiting volunteers is an opportunity to be creative and inclusive: how can you best reach out to all corners of your community? Can you involve children and young people?

To assist with recruitment creating job roles (like a job description) for volunteers begins to set some parameters. Not only a list of duties but what they expect in return from the organisation, headings may include:

- Main purpose of the role
- Who the volunteer will be responsible to and for
- List of tasks and their frequency
- Skills required for the role
- Estimated time commitment
- How long will the role last

- How they will claim out of pocket expenses
- What skills the role may develop in the individual
- Any special conditions

Volunteers often hear about opportunities by word of mouth, but if potential volunteers aren't coming to you, you will have to be more proactive in finding them.

You could:

- print flyers and give out to relevant organizations/events
- check past and present members of your mailing list
- use some editorial space in the local press
- ask your local radio station to publicise your need
- hand flyers out at your event, asking for future volunteers
- register your volunteering opportunities on the online organization Do-It! <http://www.do-it.org.uk/needvolunteers> which offers advice to organizations looking for volunteers, as well as volunteers looking for opportunities. It holds a national database covering all areas of volunteering possibilities, although so far there are few relating to festivals and events. They suggest you contact your local Volunteer Centre to register your needs.

www.volunteercentrenewcastle.org.uk

You need to ask the potential volunteers to fill in a form, giving all their contact details, availability, any relevant skills/experience, preference for type of work etc. See Sample Volunteer Form

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Remember that if they are **working with children**, they will need CRB clearance. You should check the latest regulations for CRB (**Criminal Records Bureau**) disclosures at www.disclosure.gov.uk or by phoning the information line at 0870 909 0811.

Volunteers need to be committed and reliable - just because they are providing a service free of charge doesn't mean it is any less important that they turn up on time and do the job properly. Conversely, they must be treated with respect by the event organizers, and great care should be taken to avoid an 'us' and 'them' divide between paid workers and volunteers.

Training

Once someone is interested in the role you may need to determine exactly their skill base to ensure they are supported in that role as much as possible. This can be achieved through discussion with the volunteer of what they think the skills required are to undertake the role.

Once this has been determined, any gaps in skills or knowledge jointly agreed can be assessed as part of your training programme, either internally through mentoring and shadowing, or externally through training agencies.

See Training Opportunities for Event Management

Well motivated people will provide the best service, so make sure that everyone is well briefed, feels involved, has a clear set of responsibilities and is capable of doing their job. If you make your team feel appreciated and thank them after the event, they are likely to want to help you again.

If you are taking on a large number of volunteers, it would be advisable to divide them into teams, each with a team leader. You would then keep these Senior Stewards briefed, and they would make sure their team knew what to do.

Once you have selected co-workers, you will need to carry out on-site induction, training and briefing sessions. You may decide to hold several short sessions focusing on different topics:

- event and procedures
- dealing with incidents and emergencies
- managing the public
- final briefing
- post-event feedback

Make sure that all volunteers know:

- What facilities/services are available and where to find them
- How to manage problems, including:
 - unforeseen incidents and eventualities
 - emergencies like fire or bomb scare
 - accidents (to meet health and safety requirements, any accidents must be logged – see Health & Safety
 - lost and found children
 - lost property
 - directions/information on and off site
 - information on local amenities for visitors

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All team leaders should have access to a radio phone (walkie/talkie) or mobile phone (check that coverage is available on site), and be provided with contact names/telephone numbers, especially for the organiser/line manager over 24-hour period.

In case of an incident, all action taken must be recorded - this will help you in evaluating the event afterwards.

Volunteer management

Even though volunteers are not paid members of staff they need managing; they require parameters in which they are working, these may be negotiated rather than assigned but they nonetheless need structure.

To ensure that the people element, possibly one of the most important elements of your event, runs smoothly someone must assume the lead. Volunteer management is a two-way contract, volunteers want something in return for their efforts, from a feeling of satisfaction to the learning of new skills or work experience.

How do you manage your most valuable asset? Working through the volunteer management health check may help identify issues that need to be addressed:

- **Structure of your organisation**
 - Is the structure clear to understand?
 - Does the volunteer know where they fit?
- **Planning**
 - Do you have a Volunteer Action Plan?
 - Do you plan for the well being of volunteers?
 - Do you have a succession plan?

- Do you review volunteers' roles?
- Do volunteers contribute towards planning?

- **Communication**

- Is communication two-way?
- What methods of communication are used? Is information targeted at volunteers?

- **Recruitment**

- Are skills, time, knowledge & interests matched to roles?
- Are role outlines produced?
- Is recruitment proactive or reactive?
- Do you have a recruitment policy?

- **Volunteer coordination**

- Do you have a volunteer coordinator?
- Who do volunteers go to for help?
- Who reviews volunteers, their roles and the policy?
- Who maintains volunteer motivation?

- **Relationship between paid staff and volunteers**

- Do staff and volunteers work as a team?
- Is there a code of practice about how they work together?
- Can volunteers manage staff and visa versa?

- **Induction and training**

- Do you have an induction programme?
- Do you have a training programme?

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- Do you undertake shadowing and mentoring?
- Is your training linked to your Volunteer Action Plan?
- **Recognition and reward**
 - Do you regularly recognise voluntary contribution?
 - Do you proactively reimburse out of pocket expenses?
 - Do you publicise your volunteering programme?
 - Do you say 'thank you'?

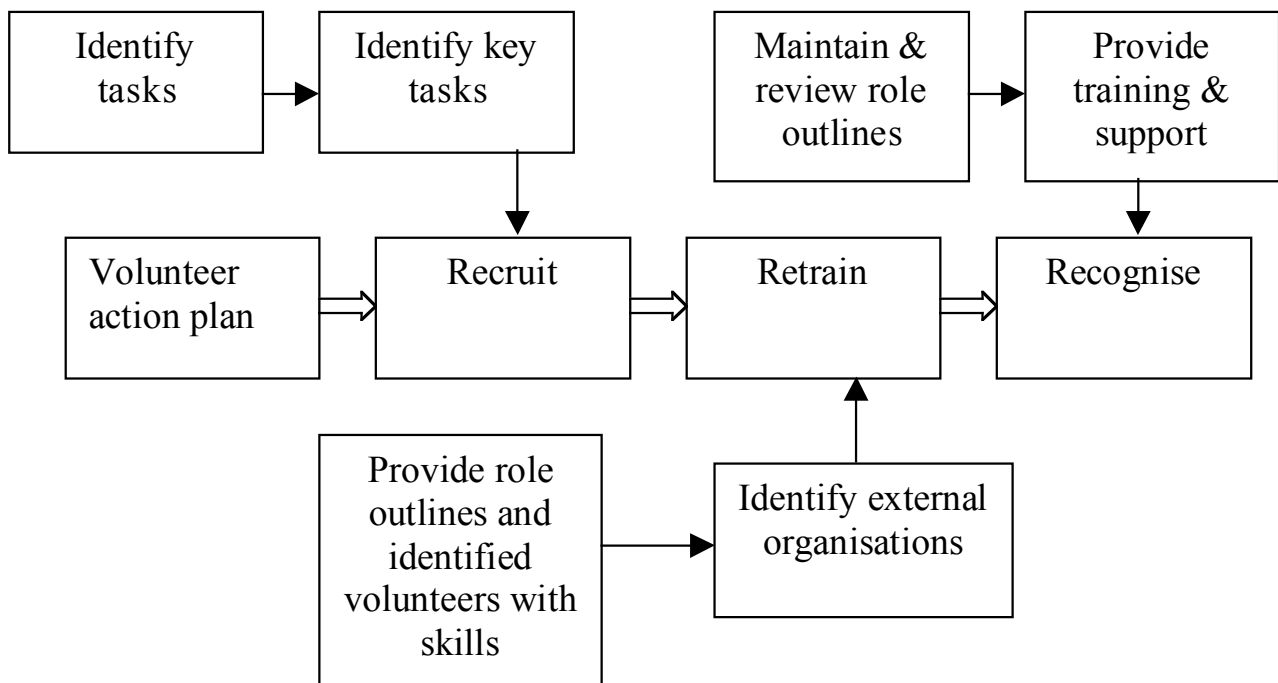
Once you have honestly identified what you are doing to support your volunteers you can begin to work through a critical planning pathway for volunteer management and develop an action plan.

Volunteer Action Plan

The key element to good volunteer management is planning in advance your Volunteer Action Plan. This does not need to be a lengthy document but something that everybody signs up to, and which creates a journey for you and your volunteers that has four simple steps:

1. **Where are you now?** ~ what is your current volunteer situation?
2. **Where do you want to be?** ~ the ideal of having the right people in the right place doing the right task at the right time
3. **How are you going to get there?** ~ the action plan
4. **How will you know you have got there?** ~ what milestones have you got?

Example ~ Volunteer Action Plan



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Recognise

Everybody needs to feel that they are valued, and 'thank you' is a simple way of doing it. Don't take volunteers for granted – retention is the hardest part.

Ensure that you recognise volunteers' efforts throughout their work not just at the end of it:

- providing them with a t-shirt or uniform makes them feel special and identifies staff for events;
- asking after their welfare;
- organising an event just for them;
- ensuring that their friends and family get priority treatment for entry into events (this may be the only time they get to see them in busy volunteering times); and
- recognise volunteers' efforts to those outside your organisation, through the press.

Further Information

www.do-it.org.uk is a national database for volunteering opportunities

www.timebank.org.uk appeals to people who know that their time and skills are in demand - but just don't know what to do about it or where to start.

www.volunteering.org.uk works to support an increase in the quality, quantity, impact and accessibility of volunteering throughout England

www.volresource.org.uk aims to make it quick and easy to get to useful information on anything to do with running a voluntary organisation

www.csv.org.uk involves people in high quality volunteering and learning opportunities that tackle real need and enrich lives

www.volunteermanagement.com training tools for managers and directors of volunteers

Other Related Fact Sheets

Training Opportunities for Event Management

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