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What is a volunteer?

Volunteering is about people giving their time unpaid to take part in activities that benefit others and/or the community.

There are different types of volunteering:

- **Informal volunteers** - unpaid help as an individual to other people who are not relatives, such as getting an elderly neighbour's shopping.
- **Formal volunteers** - giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations.

Why do people volunteer?

Volunteers are all different and there are many reasons for volunteering. They include but aren't limited to:

- Learning new skills and valuable work experience.
- Making new friends
- Improving physical and mental health and wellbeing
- Giving something back
- Improving confidence
- Provides a sense of connection to others in the community
- Improve how things work for the better
- Shows commitment.
- To have fun!

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Planning for your Volunteers

What are barriers to volunteering?

There are barriers that may stop people from volunteering. Some are less obvious than others. Common barriers to volunteering can include time age, disability, money and perception. Methods to overcome these include:

- Market the roles to harder to reach groups and encourage diversity.
- Use images and language that promote and reflect diversity.
- Create a variety of volunteering opportunities, including micro volunteering (volunteering in small chunks of time) that can be undertaken by someone with various levels of skill and commitment.
- Provide transport if necessary and/or reimburse expenses for travel and other essential items when volunteering where possible.
- Adapt your premises to provide disabled access.
- Be ready to adapt a role to suit individual volunteer's needs.
- Offer training and support.
- Wherever possible minimise the bureaucracy and response time to potential volunteers.

Will it cost anything?

Yes, volunteers give their time, energy, and skills free of charge. However, volunteers are not cost free.

You will need to consider out of pocket expenses, as volunteers give their time freely, and should not be out of pocket financially. Think also about whether the insurance you have is suitable to cover the needs of your volunteers, and whether there are any other expenses involved in supporting the volunteers.

Are you clear why you need volunteers?

Volunteers should not replace paid staff but provide added benefit to the organisation. Here are a few points that will help you to clarify why you need volunteers.

- Are the roles that you want volunteers to do fair and fulfilling? Will they satisfy the needs of volunteers?
- Are you clear what a volunteer is and what motivates them?
- Think about the tasks you want your volunteers to do.
- Think about what volunteers will want from you and your group/organisation.
- Why would they want to volunteer for you and what other benefits will they gain from volunteering with your group/organisation?

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Roles and responsibilities – what do you want volunteers to do?

Both your group or organisation and the volunteers themselves will have expectations of what their role will be – it is up to you to plan what you want from the volunteer, and to clarify their responsibilities.

The volunteer can then decide if that is what they want to do. It is also possible to design roles and responsibilities around the interests, skills, and knowledge of the potential volunteer. Again, clarifying the role is essential for both the organisation and the volunteer before they start. By giving their time, energy, skills and commitment, volunteers are contributing to your organisation. This contribution should be recognised.

Who will manage or support your volunteers?

Volunteers will need to feel that they have a direct contact within your group or organisation – so you will need to consider who that person will be. It could be a member of staff or committee, with experience in leading a team, or it could be an identified volunteer, or group of people, all of whom can support the volunteers.

How will everyone work together?

It is important that when your group or organisation first involves volunteers or establishes new volunteer roles it makes sure that everyone in the group is aware of that, including your committee or Board of Trustees - after all, they are volunteers as well!

Think about how everyone will work together – volunteers, paid staff, service users and external groups.

Work with your committee or colleagues to define what volunteers will do. Consider who else will be involved with volunteers, what will their relationship be? It is useful to do this so that there is no confusion of roles later.

What is a volunteer manager?

Lots of people participate in managing, supporting, coordinating, and organising volunteers. This may be in paid employment or in a volunteering capacity. Many do not call themselves volunteer managers - they just get on with the job! If you find yourself organising, leading, co-coordinating, and supporting the activities of the volunteers - then you are fulfilling that role.

Volunteer managers tasks may include:

- Co-ordinating activities, making sure people turn up and supporting others.
- Working out what skills are needed to get the task done.
- Identify what individuals would do and explain to them how to accomplish it.
- Finding and recruiting extra people if necessary.

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- Supporting and encouraging everyone to achieve the task and thanking everyone at the end of the task.

Checklist - before you involve volunteers	
Is everyone in the organisation informed/consulted about plans to involve volunteers?	Yes/No
What will change for those already involved with the organisation (staff, trustees, service users, other volunteers)?	Yes/No
Are there people who would supervise and support volunteers?	Yes/No
Have you ensured that the people supporting volunteers are suitably skilled and trained?	Yes/No
Is there a budget to cover cost of supervision staff, expenses, admin, training, DBS checks and any other expenses that are applicable to the role?	Yes/No
Are there enough resources to involve volunteers such as space, computer, desk, etc?	Yes/No
Have you analysed any risk in relation to volunteers and to the organisation?	Yes/No
Have you got adequate insurance that covers volunteers?	Yes/No
Have you prepared necessary processes and policies for volunteers?	Yes/No
Are you ready for the new ideas, changes and new skills that volunteers often contribute?	Yes/No
Are you ready to apply and update good practice in volunteer management.	Yes/No

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