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Why involve volunteers?

There are many great reasons why an organisation may involve volunteers in its work. It is worth bearing in mind that involving volunteers effectively is an investment. It takes willingness and resources such as the time to recruit, manage and support people, provide workspace and equipment, and reimburse out-of-pocket expenses.

So why make this investment?

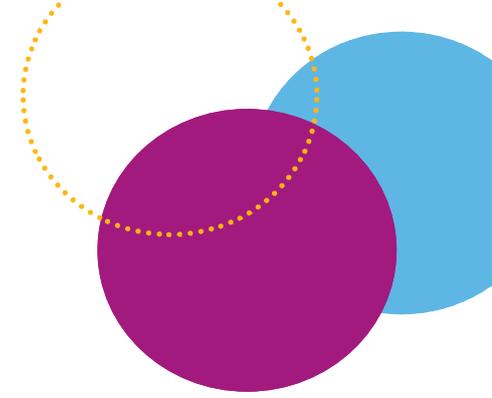
- Enable your organisation to reach more people, or offer more support or services to your users
- Widen participation, involve more diverse groups of people, enable greater local input. Volunteers can help keep your organisation relevant by contributing a range of ideas and views
- Fresh perspectives, energy and enthusiasm
- Raise awareness of your cause and help to promote what you do
- Volunteers have a different relationship with your users than that of staff, and it can be good to know they are there because they want to be - not just because it is their job
- Volunteers bring a variety of skills, experience and enthusiasm - particularly valuable for smaller organisations that may not be able to pay for such expertise
- Volunteers can add credibility to an organisation – people giving their time suggests that the work must be of value

If you're new to involving volunteers, set up for success by making sure you start with positive reasons. Avoid taking on volunteers just to do those tasks that no-one else wants to do, and don't fall into the trap of thinking of volunteers as a cheap substitute for paid staff. Volunteering is all about mutual goodwill.

Plan ahead before recruiting volunteers:

- Be clear about your reasons for wanting to involve volunteers
- Think about why people might want to volunteer, and why they should choose your organisation
- Define the roles and responsibilities that volunteers will take on
- Establish that you have enough resources to support volunteers
- Be prepared to explain how and why volunteers will contribute to the overall aims and objectives of the organisation

If funding or finding resources to support your volunteers is a problem, talk to your local voluntary sector support and development organisation (find contact details via www.lincolnshirevolunteering.org.uk) for advice about how to incorporate the costs of volunteer management into your funding applications and project bids. Most funders will see it as a legitimate part of your overall budget.



Volunteering is most likely to work well if:

- The organisation has clear reasons for involving volunteers
- You are prepared to spend time acknowledging and recognising what they contribute
- Trustees, managers, staff, volunteers and service users understand why volunteers are there, and appreciate what they bring
- The roles of volunteers are clearly defined, so that paid staff do not feel undermined or threatened and volunteers feel secure about what they are doing
- There is an organisational culture which values the involvement of volunteers and makes sure it has the resources to support them properly
- You have something to offer volunteers, for example the chance to make a real difference, a great training programme, getting out in the fresh air, learning new skills, staying active, meeting new people, a change of direction, a sense of satisfaction.