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Recruiting volunteers

How to find potential volunteers

Most volunteers are recruited by word of mouth - through friends, relatives or colleagues. This means that it is important that volunteers have a good experience with your organisation. Word of mouth is a powerful tool – volunteers who have a good experience with your organisation are great ambassadors, but similarly volunteers who have a poor experience will not be singing your praises!

However word of mouth is only one way, and the down side is that you tend to be less likely to recruit a really diverse pool of volunteers. This can mean that your organisation begins to stagnate, so to avoid that it is best to use a variety of methods of recruitment.

Advertise through your local Volunteer Centre

Volunteer Centres have a database of local opportunities and publish bulletins regularly. It's free, and it reaches people of all ages who are interested in volunteering/community action. For contact details of your nearest Volunteer Centre, see **Sheet 18 'How can Volunteer Centres help'**.

Do-it website

www.do-it.org is a searchable online portal for volunteering opportunities. Volunteer Centres can post your opportunities to Do-it if you wish, or you can create your own organisation's account.

Advertise in the community

You could try using posters, leaflets, presentations or local papers and magazines to get the word out there. Or why not make a direct approach to organisations who already work with people you want to reach. For example make use of schools, colleges, local clubs/societies or employers to reach new people.

Social media

By using social media such as Facebook or Twitter to connect with people interested in your cause, you can then invite them to help when you need volunteers.

Your own website

Make sure your website has information about how people can support your organisation, and how they can find out more about volunteering with you.

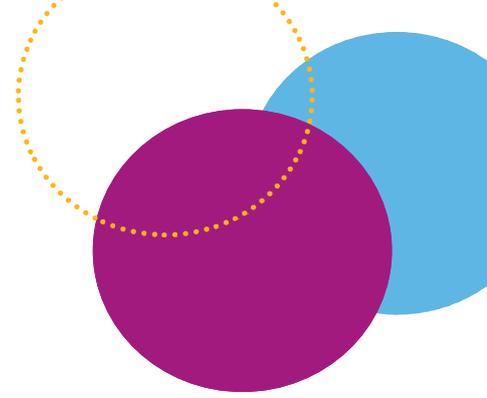
Specialist brokers

There are a few specialist volunteer broker services that can link you up with people who have professional or technical skills. See **Sheet 20 'How to find out more'** for details.

Are you ready to respond to enquiries?

There are thousands of things people could choose to do with their time, so treat any volunteer enquiry as a gift. Respond quickly and with enthusiasm. An unexplained delay or an unwelcoming response is likely to appear ungrateful and off-putting to volunteers.

The initial contact (whether it is by telephone or email) needs to be friendly, welcoming and keen. Whoever responds to enquiries needs to be well-informed, approachable, able to answer questions and tell the enquirer what will happen next.



It is unrealistic to expect every expression of interest to result in an actual volunteer. Be prepared to give people the chance to find out more about you before they make an informed choice. Recruitment is mutual - it is as much about the volunteer deciding if the role is right for them, as it is about you deciding if the volunteer is right for the role.

If there is a selection process (such as taking up references, Disclosure and Barring Service checks) then take time to explain what is involved, what information will be needed and why you need it. Most importantly, keep volunteers informed at every stage of the recruitment process to maintain their interest.

Be positive

Enthusiasm and a good welcome can go a long way to creating a good first impression of your organisation. Bear in mind the key differences between recruiting volunteers and recruiting paid staff.

Paid staff:

- **Competitive for applicants** involving the selection of one candidate over the others - and most people need a job
- In most cases the aim is to reject all but the successful candidate
- Often time-limited, with a fixed deadline for applications

Volunteers:

- **Competitive for organisations** with many opportunities to apply for. Volunteers can be choosy and will select the organisation they like best – and they don't need to volunteer at all
- In most cases, organisations need to attract and retain as many suitable volunteers as possible, not just one
- Often an ongoing process where volunteers may apply at any time