

---

## Recruiting volunteers

This information sheet covers the recruitment process. It's important to get this right, both to attract people who will be a good match for your roles, and to ensure that the volunteering relationship starts off on the right foot.

This document:

- Explains the differences between recruitment for paid staff and for volunteers
- Offers guidance on advertising for volunteers
- Describes the volunteer recruitment process, including
  - How to interview
  - Ensuring potential volunteers have enough information to make a decision about joining you
  - How to select volunteers
  - How to say no to a potential volunteer if they are not a good fit for the role, or for your organisation

### **Is there anything we need to do prior to recruitment?**

Putting up a public message asking for volunteers is not the first step of recruitment. It pays dividends to plan and prepare. This will help you put together roles that will meet your needs, and attract a “better fit” of potential volunteers, and helps you to get everything in place prior to their arrival.

See our information sheets on *Creating Volunteer Roles* and *Planning for Volunteer Involvement* for guidance on these topics.

### **We already recruit for paid workers, can't we just do the same things for volunteers?**

In many ways the process for recruiting volunteers will be similar to that for paid workers. You're advertising for a position and following a procedure that leads to the selection of candidates. Much of what you'll do will mirror what you'd do when recruiting employees. However, the underlying spirit of what you're doing is, or at least should be, different. Additionally, there are key differences between paid workers and volunteers – most importantly that volunteers do not work under contract and are not subject to employment legislation rights in the workplace. You should, however, as a recruiting organisation, ensure that you comply with Health and Safety and insurance requirements for those volunteering under your organisational “banner”.

When recruiting paid workers, you are generally looking for the best candidate out of perhaps dozens of applicants. You want them to show you exactly why you should pick them, what makes their skills better than those of other people who have applied. With volunteering, the question you're asking yourself is generally not 'is there a reason to take this person on?', but 'is there a reason not to?' You're looking for people who can carry out the role given the level of training and support you can provide, not the ideal volunteer.

In addition, potential volunteers might also view the recruitment pathway as very much based on an employment model. This can be a problem, as if they are lacking confidence and believe they will have to sell themselves and compete with others, they may well be "put off" from applying, or at least will find it a stressful process. Volunteers may worry that they don't have the right experience, qualifications, or skills. They might not have recent workplace references.

You should emphasise that the process is about you and the volunteer both finding out about each other – it's a mutual decision after all – and avoid over-formalising your procedures.

### **What do we need to consider for our recruitment messages?**

You are in effect marketing your volunteer roles, 'selling' them to potential volunteers. Therefore, you should think about what will inform and attract people.

**What** – what is the role? What will the volunteers be doing?

**Why** – why is the role needed (i.e. what social/community/environmental need will it meet)? Why should someone carry out the role (what will people get from it)?

**Who** – who are you looking for? In most cases this will be more or less anyone who is willing to get involved, but in other cases specific skills might be valuable (for example, treasurer trustee roles)

**Where** – where will the role take place?

**When** – how much time is needed? What time of day do people need to be available?

**How** – how do people get involved – i.e. what is the next step for anyone interested?

Note that this is not to say that you need to design a poster that goes through the above in order, or indeed addresses everything here (you may want to grab attention and supplement some of the other elements, with an online presence, for example). Each advert should explain who you are as an organisation, what you can offer to your volunteers, as well as what qualities and skills you are hoping to gain from them.

## **How should we advertise our role?**

There are lots of different ways of promoting your volunteer roles. Some are more time-consuming/costly than others.

### *Volunteer Centre Bexley*

The Volunteer Centre maintains an online database of voluntary work, and runs regular signposting sessions, meeting people interested in volunteering, as well as running a substantial events and outreach programme to advertise roles more widely. We act a little like a dating agency, matching up potential volunteers with your roles. Contact us at [bexleyvc@bvsc.co.uk](mailto:bexleyvc@bvsc.co.uk) for more information.

### *Posters and leaflets*

There are many places to put up posters. You could ask staff and volunteers to put them up locally to them. Places to consider include:

- GP Surgeries
- Community Centres
- Places of worship
- Sports Centres
- Libraries
- Supermarkets (they often have community noticeboards)
- Local shops

### *Social Media*

Get Twittering, Facebooking, “WhatsApp”ing and anything else you can think of. Consider the demographic that you are hoping to attract. Would Tiktok or Snapchat (or another method) reach the intended group better?

### *Local media*

If you have a project that you think is newsworthy you could interest the local press in running a story on it, with a call for more volunteers. Or if you have the budget, you could place an advert.

### *Open days and Volunteer Fairs*

By creating an event you give people an opportunity to see what the roles you have to offer will be like. You could have current volunteers on-hand to talk about their work and why they give their time, and tasks available so people can have a taste of what volunteering with you might be like.

### *Word of mouth/directly asking people*

This kind of approach can be powerful. Time and time again, volunteering surveys place 'someone asked me to' highly among the reasons people give for why they are volunteering.

### *Community events*

A stall at a community fun day or similar event is a good opportunity to promote roles and meet people face to face.

### *Talks*

Many groups are eager for outside speakers – sixth form classes, the Women's Institute, Rotary Club etc. This can be an opportunity to engage with interested people and turn that interest into action.

## **How should we use our website?**

It's surprising how many organisations neglect their website as a resource for recruiting volunteers. There are two facets to this. First, you should be letting people who visit the website know that your work involves volunteers, and that this is a key way they can support you. Second, this is the place to give great information about the roles you have to offer for people who may have heard that you're looking for volunteers and might be interested in lending a hand. For example, you could have current volunteers writing about their experience, or service-users explaining what a difference the project and its volunteers have made.

## **What information should we give enquirers?**

The key information would be:

- A role description will give people a good overview of the role and the tasks it entails.
- Background information about the organisation and the project
- An explanation of the recruitment process – i.e. what happens next
- An application form if you are using one

Some organisations send more information, such as a copy of the volunteer handbook.

## **Do we need an application form?**

This is up to you and your circumstances. If you don't have a need for one then it makes sense not to use them – no one likes filling in forms, and in any case, it's an extra step and removing it makes the recruitment process quicker. You could ask the same questions as part of the interview, and record the details in person.

This is not to say you're breaching good practice by using them – most organisations do. An application form may be helpful in weeding out applications from people who are clearly not

suited to the role, or to manage large numbers of enquiries, for example. You should also consider the demographic or work area that the volunteer will be supporting (you should already have set up a formal risk assessment for the role and associated activities). This will give you a “steer” on whether an application form is appropriate, or not.

### **How do we conduct an interview?**

Firstly, you should consider calling it something less threatening – a chat, or at very least an ‘informal interview’. None of us like interviews. The point isn’t to make potential volunteers feel nervous, put them on the spot and perhaps catch them out. You want to give the person the best opportunity to talk about themselves and why they want to volunteer. Try to avoid the model of firing questions over a desk. Showing people round, introducing them to staff and volunteers, and so on, can break the ice.

What do you need to know? In some cases, this will simply be a little about the person’s background, what skills they have, and why they want to carry out the role. You should also ensure that they have a decent idea of what the role entails (this will come as much from you, as any questions you ask). Questions about following policies and principles would be sensible – some people believe that being a volunteer means they don’t have to turn up on time, or that they don’t need to concern themselves with equalities policies. Other questions might be more specific to the activities they’ll be carrying out – e.g. around dealing with customers for front of house charity shop volunteers.

The question about motivations is an important one. As volunteers aren’t being paid there have to be other things which attract them to a particular role, and keep them coming back. If a volunteer’s motivations aren’t met by their role they are unlikely to stay beyond the short term, or at least not give the effort they otherwise might. So, motivations are worth checking so that you can decide early on whether the role is not for them – you may have other roles that would offer what they were looking for, or you could signpost to the Volunteer Centre for help finding an alternative. Secondly you could alter the role to suit them better. For example, if they are looking for good work experience you could decide to give them a rolling programme of tasks that might help their CV.

You should also make a list of the information you want to give potential volunteers. Some people will have lots of questions, but others might still be a little intimidated, even if you have tried to make the process as welcoming as possible. The aim is to give them enough information for them to be able to make an informed decision about whether they want to volunteer. The process should be about both of you making a decision, not just yourself as a recruiter.

### **How should we select volunteers?**

Selection should be fair and reasonable. Remember, you are rarely looking for the ‘best’ potential volunteer. The key question should be ‘can this person carry out the role, given the level of training and support we can offer?’

Your role description should give you a good framework for determining this. Where possible try to be flexible. For example, a person with a lack of confidence might not be able to carry out every aspect of a role at first – you may well be able to accommodate this. On the other hand, do be conscious of the level of support you can provide. If someone will need more help than you can offer then you will not be assisting them by taking them on.

Other considerations might be:

*The person's reasons for volunteering and attitude to the role* – if someone wants to volunteer because they're looking for something social and you know that most of the time they'll be on their own, then the role probably isn't right for them. And if the potential volunteer doesn't seem too enthusiastic about the role itself but just wants something on their CV you might feel they aren't right for you

*Their willingness to follow procedures* – some people imagine as it's voluntary work they can do more or less as they please. It will help if you set up clear expectations from the start (many organisations ask volunteers to sign a "Volunteer Agreement", covering standards of behaviour and key policies, to ensure that there is clarity from the start).

*Their understanding of relevant issues* – diversity, confidentiality, safeguarding and so on. This is quite important – don't just rely on giving someone a policy. Attitudes matter. Note that this doesn't mean that they should be coming to you with an academic understanding of, say confidentiality, simply that they are willing to learn, follow guidelines, and understand why the issue is important.

### **How do we say no?**

This is always going to be awkward, as of course people are offering you their time. Remember that you do have the right to say no. You are not duty bound to take on any potential volunteer, although you should of course satisfy yourself that you have good grounds for any refusal.

Be honest (without being hurtful). You are not doing the applicant any favours if they keep applying for roles that are not right for them. Where possible, offer alternatives. You might have other roles that are better suited to them. Failing that, direct them to the Volunteer Centre or other organisations you're aware of that might have roles for them.

### **Can we offer a trial period?**

We tend to call them taster periods, and they can be a good idea. 'Taster' rather than 'trial' period is a less off-putting phrase, but it also shows a slight change in emphasis. They allow volunteers the chance to give the role a go in the knowledge that they can back out at the end of the period without feeling they have let anyone down. They also give you the chance to see the volunteer in action, which can be helpful in the decision-making process.

**Further information:**

NCVO volunteer recruitment guidance: [NVCOvolunteermanagementguidance](#)

Volunteer Centre Bexley information sheets:

*Planning for volunteer involvement*

*Creating volunteer roles*

---

Volunteer Centre Bexley  
Tel: 01322 524682 opt 2

[bexleyvc@bvsc.co.uk](mailto:bexleyvc@bvsc.co.uk)

[www.bvsc.co.uk](http://www.bvsc.co.uk)

Last updated: Aug 23 (MM)