

Encouraging a Diverse Range of People to Volunteer for Your Organisation

What are the advantages of having a diverse range of volunteers?

Having a more diverse range of people volunteering with your organisation will mean that you will have more skills and experiences to draw upon and the organisation will become more inclusive and welcoming to all.

People with different backgrounds and experiences will bring a broader range of ideas which could lead to developing new projects or reinvigorating existing ones. An organisation that has a more diverse range of people will be more welcoming to all, including service users and volunteers. Furthermore, making your volunteer roles more relevant and appropriate to a wider range of people will mean that you will have a greater pool of potential volunteers.

Volunteering is beneficial to both the volunteer and the organisation, and everyone should be able to get involved in volunteering if they want to. However, there may be barriers which prevent some people, from volunteering, or others may not be getting involved simply because they have not been asked.

Why people might not volunteer

To encourage people from different sectors of society you need to be able to understand what might be stopping them from volunteering and look at how the organisation can help overcome these barriers. If people feel that they might be financially worse off by volunteering or that the recruitment process is too bureaucratic for example, they may not consider asking about volunteering.

Someone may also feel that they “won’t fit in” because of their faith, being of no faith or they because of their sexuality or how they identify in terms of gender.

Potential volunteers might associate a particular organisation or the work that they do with a particular views or values, and if the potential volunteer does not come share those values, they might not consider volunteering for the organisation. Therefore, getting the message out to people that the group or organisation is welcoming to all by having a flexible approach to volunteer roles and how things are done, is very important.

For example, people might think that volunteering will affect their entitlement to benefits or might not realise that expenses might be reimbursed to cover travel and other expenses. Some people might not feel that they have anything to offer an organisation, or that they won’t be welcomed because they have a criminal record, or because they have a disability, learning difficulty or because they lack confidence. Other people from countries outside the UK may feel that they will not be welcomed.

How do you encourage a more diverse range of people to volunteer?

Letting people know that your group or organisation is welcoming to all is important if you want to attract a diverse range of people. Getting that message out to people might require doing things differently to meet the priorities of potential volunteers and to give them ownership of the volunteer role. Below is a list of points to consider (not an exhaustive list) to look at how you could do things differently to help you attract a diverse range of people.

Points to consider when looking at increasing diversity:

Have an Equality and Diversity Policy and follow procedures clearly stating that you actively welcome people from all parts of society and do not tolerate discrimination – and use it!

Have a flexible approach to the volunteer roles that you have. Can the roles be done at different times of the day, can they be done remotely, or do you have opportunities for virtual volunteering?

Look at how and where you advertise. Do you use pictures that show a cross section of society? Do you go out to your potential volunteers (e.g. giving talks to groups) or expect them to come to you? Where do you target your advertising?

Look at your recruitment method. Do you use application forms that people who lack confidence, have a learning difficulty, a sensory impairment or who do not have English as their first language might find difficult to complete?

Check your advertising and recruitment literature, do you use 'business speak' or more everyday language?

Is there a budget for expenses? Can transport costs and other expenses be covered or do you offer a pick-up service or crèche facilities?

Do you have resources and equipment to provide support and devices to enable people with support needs to carry out their volunteering activities?

Do you have or have you considered applying for the Investors in Volunteering award or other quality awards to show that you have a positive attitude towards different groups of society?

Do your social activities reflect the diversity of your volunteers? Do you have different activities to suit all?

Does your organisation have people from underrepresented groups in management/decision making roles i.e. trustees?

Finally, diversity is about valuing differences and considering your potential volunteers' priorities.