

# Understanding Volunteer Motivation

## Why do people volunteer?

People volunteer for a variety of reasons ranging from wanting to meet people and be involved in the local community to being proactive in supporting a cause or “giving something back” to an organisation that once helped them. College students and unemployed people might take up volunteering to help them increase their skills and boost their chances of getting a job and people who are new to an area or are retired, might take up volunteering to meet people and make new friends.

The motivation behind someone’s desire to volunteer, the amount of time the person has available and their personal circumstances, will all have a bearing on the organisation they choose to volunteer for, the type of activities that they choose to undertake and their level of involvement with the organisation. Other factors such as the level of support and training opportunities provided by the organisation and whether expenses are reimbursed, could also influence which organisation or role an individual may find more appealing.

Some people might want to be involved in volunteering on a regular basis (e.g. once a month or more) whilst others might only want to be involved in a one-off activity or during a particular time of the year, such as during the summer or at Christmas. Students, for example, might be looking to volunteer during the holidays whilst someone with a family might be looking for more one-off activities, rather than a volunteering opportunity that requires a regular time commitment.

Whatever the reason a person wants to volunteer, understanding their motivation will help you in supporting and developing that volunteer and hopefully retaining them. Information on someone’s motivation to volunteer can be gained at the recruitment stage on an application form, during an informal chat or at an interview. Keeping track of whether a person’s motivation has changed is also important and can be done through regular 1:1 or ‘supervision and support’ sessions.

## Why motivations might change.

As a person’s circumstances change so too may their main motivations for volunteering. For example, someone who started volunteering to increase their confidence might, once they gain in confidence through their initial volunteer role, want to move to another volunteer role to develop themselves further.

Also, as a person’s circumstances may change so the amount of time, they have available could change. For example, if someone volunteered to increase their chance of gaining employment and they were successful in doing this, then the amount of time they have available to volunteer could change. Nevertheless, the volunteer may still want to be involved with the organisation and could look at other roles within the organisation that might be more suitable.

## How do you keep people motivated?

Understanding why a person wants to volunteer will help with matching that person to a volunteer role and with managing that volunteer in terms of keeping them motivated. Carrying out supervision sessions, whether these are formal or informal, will help you ascertain whether a person would like to take on more responsibility, undertake training or be involved in another volunteer role. For example, if a person is new to an area and wants to volunteer to meet people, then a role that involves team working might be ideal. Keeping this volunteer motivated would involve making sure that the volunteer is happy in the team environment and getting them involved in other activities where they are likely to meet new people.

It is a good idea to let your volunteers know if they are able to develop their existing roles further or move to a different role in your organisation to gain further experience. This might prevent a volunteer “out-growing” their role and leaving without giving you the opportunity to present this as an option.

### Some reasons people volunteer

*It is a cause they strongly believe in*

*To increase self-esteem*

*To feel part of their local community*

*To meet new people and make new friends*

*To feel useful*

*To learn new skills*

*To use existing skills*

*To gain experience in a specific field of work*

### Tools to use to keep volunteers motivated

**Make volunteer roles rewarding:** think about the different tasks. Are some challenging? Is there a chance to learn new skills? Is training available?

**Induction:** get to know your volunteer. Make the volunteer feel part of the organisation and team.

**Support sessions:** have regular support sessions to gain feedback from the volunteer on their role. Look at training needs. Is the volunteer happy in their role? Are there other roles or tasks that they are interested in?

**Recognition:** are volunteers involved in decision-making and are their achievements recognised? Emphasize the contribution the volunteer makes to your organisation’s activities and celebrate them.

### And finally...

Get to know your volunteers, their interests and aspirations and look at how these can be met through the volunteering roles in your organisation.