

Working with volunteers

Working with volunteers is a vital part of securing a better financial system for your local communities. It is also very rewarding for those volunteering. Marilyn is HR Manager for Newcastle Diocese. She explained why she's been volunteering for a community bank:

"I've been thinking of doing some voluntary work for about 12 months, something that was a little different to my 'day job' but allowed me to make a real contribution... it immediately grabbed my attention. It offers the opportunity to do something really worthwhile and I'm hoping I'll be able to make a big contribution through this excellent work."

Marilyn is just one of many people who have stepped up to support the bank as it has grown. As people with experience like Marilyn join, the organisation is able to use their professional skills to sharpen them up. The bank now has someone to turn to when HR issues come up. Excellent volunteers and supporters like Marilyn really change the game. It gives a small financial institution real momentum.

The excitement

Marilyn said, "As this bank grows we will reach more and more people across Northumberland. This isn't just about commercial growth for us. We are excited because recruitment to the community bank means more people saving and protecting themselves from financial difficulties that may lie ahead. It also means we are able to make more loans to people who are in need of a step up.

This is a short guide to working with volunteers, covering some of the main areas. The Church Urban Fund has a more comprehensive guide found at: <https://www.cuf.org.uk/Pages/FAQs/Category/working-with-volunteers>

General Guidance

In a busy organisation, you need to fill the rotas and get the jobs done. It's easy to just fill roles without asking too many other questions. To get the best out of people though, it's important to enable volunteers to flourish in their role and develop as individuals.

Recruiting volunteers who have skills already is very useful as we saw above. But sometimes, finding people who are willing to learn but don't yet have the skills is a good option. Helping volunteers to grow their skills is a vital part of the process.

There are some key questions to ask when looking for volunteers.

- What are they going to do? Is there a specific role you're looking to fill?
- How will you match people to suitable roles?
- What are the practical considerations? Have you put in place everything that will be needed for a volunteer to thrive and do the task that's needed?

Recruitment and expectations

We've already touched on this above – but being clear about what you need and how you will find the right person is a vital part of the process.

Here are some good questions to be asking:

- Do you have a specific task that needs doing?
- Do you need someone to help immediately, soon, or are you planning ahead?
- Does the task have any particular requirements or skills?
- Does it need to be done at a particular time? Does it need to be done in a particular place or could it be done by someone at home?
- Is it a long term commitment or could someone dip in and out?
- Will you be able to pay any out of pocket expenses?
- How will you let people know you need volunteers?
- What will happen if someone is interested?
- How will a volunteer know what is expected of them?
- What will you do if someone is interested in volunteering but the role may not be right for them?

Building good relationships with volunteers

Volunteering, because it isn't contractual or paid, is dependent on relationships. Having open, mutually beneficial and respectful relationships with volunteers is an enormous help to making things run smoothly and getting things done. Here are some tips.

- Notice volunteers and engage with them.
- Arrange opportunities to meet.
- Communicate regularly.
- Affirm the value of what the volunteer is doing.
- Ensure the volunteering is mutually beneficial.
- Remember people vary.

Encouraging development – training and support

Always remember – every volunteer is different. Here are some suggestions for ongoing development:

- Meetings with individuals or a group where you review how things are going
- Having a mentor

- Team gatherings with a training focus
- Arranging a visit or short term placement
- Arranging formal task-focussed supervision from a specialist
- A regular review with each volunteer
- Finding specialist expertise to help people do the role and develop

Practicalities

Some practical issues are essential to get right if your recruitment of volunteers is going to be a success. Here are some of those.

- **Safeguarding:**

If you have regular contact with children or vulnerable adults you need to consider safeguarding and have a statement of how you safeguard people

This statement needs to be backed up by ways of operating that are realistic and embedded within a culture that encourages people to raise concerns.

Ensure volunteers are aware of the importance of safeguarding right from the start and communicate this as part of your ethos rather than just as a requirement of law.

Some roles may require DBS checks (previously CRB checks) but it is illegal to do checks for roles that are not eligible so it is important to be sure which roles are eligible. Checks for volunteers are free but if you use an organisation to do them for you, you may have to pay an administration charge.

For more guidance NCVO have some excellent flowcharts for working out which roles are eligible for a check: <https://knowhownonprofit.org/people/volunteers/keeping/ra20children20and20young20people20flowchart20v21.pdf>.

You can contact DBS with an eligibility query. E-mail them at customerservices@dbs.gsi.gov.uk, giving them details of the role

- **Health & Safety:**

Consider any risks involved in particular tasks and how to reduce the risks, especially on risks that are highly likely to happen or would have a really serious outcome

Make sure that when you introduce someone to a new role you make them aware of Health and Safety issues, how to avoid problems and who to talk to if there is a problem

The Health and Safety Executive website (hse.gov.uk) has clear information, specifically aimed at voluntary organisations

- **Insurance:**

Let your insurer know that you involve volunteers and in what roles and activities. Many roles do not incur additional charges.

Ensure that it is clearly defined what the volunteer is doing on behalf of the project. The

agreed tasks should be described in a written role description.

The Association of British Insurers has produced a guide to insurance products for individuals and organisations and has a dedicated area of their website on voluntary organisations

■ Volunteers with Support needs

Sometimes, volunteers will have additional support needs. This might mean the need will be for physical or practical adjustments (e.g. the volunteer using a wheelchair). Sometimes a volunteer will have particular support needs. (e.g. fuller explanations, another volunteer alongside to mentor them etc).

A criminal record need not be a bar to all types of volunteering and it can be important for those with criminal records to be given an opportunity to provide evidence of their skills and willingness to be involved.

NCVO has useful information about equality and diversity including some straightforward guidance on inclusive volunteering.

Volunteers on benefits

People receiving state benefits are allowed to volunteer, for as many hours as they like. However, there are some rules that you need to be aware of.

The volunteering must comply with the government's definition of volunteering, which includes charities, voluntary organisations, community groups, social enterprises and local businesses.

People must notify their job coach or benefits adviser if they intend to start volunteering.

The only expenses you can offer are out-of-pocket expenses. This means expenses incurred in order to volunteer, for example the cost of travel, meals while out volunteering etc.

There is more information on volunteers on benefits, including Universal Credit, here: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/volunteering-and-benefits>

Difficulties will arise. It's inevitable working with people. The best practice for dealing with problems is to: listen, respond positively, reflect, consult, decide and communicate.

You can find more on these and other practicalities here: <http://www2.cuf.org.uk/sites/default/files/volunteering-guidance/managing-formalities.pdf>.

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