



Volunteering as a participation pathway and the implications for volunteer management – a seminar for practitioners

26 September 2011, 1:00 to 4:30, Voluntary Action Islington, London
Small Group Discussion Notes

This document presents a summary of the main points of the discussion session held at the Pathways through Participation seminar for volunteering infrastructure and volunteer-involving organisations. Five groups explored a different question each.

1. How might this help groups broaden the diversity of volunteers within their organisations and what needs to be done to improve equality of opportunity to participate? How do we tackle the various identity issues related to volunteering being seen negatively as ‘do-gooders’?

- Life stages – people have different amounts of free time at different stages.
 - Need to approach groups of people with this in mind
- Individuals have personal motivations, individual skills/knowledge/experience
 - Confidence of individuals
 - Flexibility
 - Managers spend time to identify how to meet individual needs
 - Recruitment and retention – support
- Organisations offer opportunity to participate
 - Make sure all people hear about / have access to opportunities
 - Make opportunities more inclusive
- Ensure all aspects of organisation offer equality of opportunity (e.g. staff, service users, trustees)
 - Welcoming atmosphere
- Organisation as trigger – ask people to participate

2. What are the implications for recruitment and retention of volunteers and how might this change your approach? Can approaches to encouraging participation that value the social dimension of people's involvement help increase the quantity and quality of volunteering? What are some of these approaches?

- Training for staff on the value of volunteering and of the importance of volunteer management
- Recognise and promote the economic value of volunteering (but also recognise the wider benefits)
- The benefit in recognising a good 'exit' (e.g. managing the process well, volunteers leaving with a good impression of the organisation)
- Retention is not necessarily the 'holy grail' to which we should all aim – short-term volunteering opportunities can be amazing and many volunteers will stop volunteering because they progress on to other (not negative) opportunities
- The importance of a good support structure (induction/training/meeting)
- Social side of volunteering
- Return calls from prospective volunteers, which is frequently not done – this is, however, a question of resources
- Given that it takes resources to take on volunteers, organisation should say no if a prospective volunteer is not appropriate or there are no relevant opportunities (or ideally refer them to another relevant organisation) – but this still takes time
- The expectations of the volunteer and the organisation should be well managed and well matched, so that both get something out of the process and have their motivation fulfilled

3. How are these types of participation interrelated, for example volunteering and giving money within the same organisation and what are the practical implications? What is the relationship between volunteering and other forms of participation and can people be encouraged to move between different types of participation (e.g. from volunteering to voting)? If so, how?

Encouraging different forms and levels of participation within same organisation:

- Are organisations that organised? They often don't know enough about their volunteers and are not set up to do this
- Some organisations do encourage this – it happens within organisations like PTAs where small involvement leads to greater involvement
- Encouraging different forms and levels of participation an organisation requires resources – time and technology (e.g. a volunteer database)

All of these:

- Not sure whether volunteering leads to giving or the other way round; sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't; there doesn't seem to be any set rules
- Sometimes volunteering leads to experience (it is not necessarily related to a passion for the cause)
- There is some brand loyalty – existing donors and volunteers represent 'captured markets'
- Organisations need to signpost volunteers so that they can meet THEIR needs but they don't always have access to information on other opportunities beyond their own organisation – organisations must be clear about their own needs and mission; there isn't always a fit between volunteers' needs and the organisation's needs

4. How can volunteer-involving organisations take advantage of the triggers, context and life stages of volunteers in recruitment and volunteer management?

Conflict and tension

- It is important to explore conflict and subsequently support it (but how?)
- Challenges: having policies and processes in place to deal with conflict

Life stages and context

- Requirement to volunteer in student courses (e.g. Disability Law Service)
- Contested but mutually beneficial
- Young people have pressure to get a job and need something on their CV – not easy but need to understand and appreciate it
- Expectations – volunteers need to be clear that a job doesn't necessarily come at the end of their volunteering (e.g. museums and heritage)
- Can be helpful as students have a clearer idea about what they want – structured progress, but can be a 'bad' habit
- Because having time available (e.g. three months) is perceived as 'better' than more episodic volunteering
- Triggers: using triggers to try to catch people who aren't involved and haven't been involved – publicity
- Initial conversation – this is where expectations are discussed and managed.
- First few weeks are key
- Publicise the work you do
- Adding to best practice – tailoring questions to the triggers
- Volunteers take advantage of the triggers, context and life stages of volunteers in recruitment and volunteer management?

5. How could Volunteer Centres be more of a key player in assisting volunteers to move between organisations and types of volunteering? How can we link better the impact and outcomes of volunteering with recruitment and retention efforts?

How can volunteers move between organisations?

- Volunteer passport (e.g. between environmental charities) so information about volunteers only needs to be collected once (e.g. their skills and experience).
- Pooling resources for training (H&S, CRB) to save money across organisations and to link volunteers together with others.
- Volunteer bank (database) to find volunteers (e.g. slivers of time) – the flipside to the volunteer opportunity databases that VCs have.
- Utilising social media networks to advertise your organisation and opportunities
- Diverse network of volunteers
- Link organisations together to increase the diversity of volunteers (e.g. proactively linking with BME groups)

How can we show what the impact of volunteering is?

- Progress report for each volunteer – informal and friendly two or three times a year
- Volunteer branding and networking – creating a brand identity so volunteers feel a part of something bigger
- Acknowledgement of work / contribution.
 - Maybe one – two times a year
 - Recognised awards
- Capture volunteering work under general organisational impact assessment
- Mentoring from long standing volunteers – share impact knowledge, etc.

