

# fact sheet 16

## training volunteers ...

### key issues

#### valuing volunteering

#### Investing in volunteer training

The training process takes time, effort and requires an input of resources. So why do it?

***The value of training is directly proportional to the effort which management puts into it. Whether you have only a few volunteers, or are entirely dependent upon them, if you don't train them then the organisation will inevitably suffer in the long run.***

Lisa Conway, 1994, Working with volunteers: training

#### Functions of volunteer training

- Training demonstrates that the organisation believes in a high standard of work
- Training lessens the likelihood of mistakes and other problems
- Some organisations use training courses as a part of their volunteer selection procedure
- Training allows new volunteers to learn about the organisation and their specific tasks
- Training also allows existing volunteers to perform their roles better and to take on new work as the organisation changes
- Training gives volunteers an opportunity to learn about the political, social and economic setting in which the organisation operates
- Training can heighten personal skills and awareness, so the volunteers can function more effectively as individuals and therefore do their voluntary work more successfully
- It can also improve interpersonal and group awareness, so volunteers can both work more effectively with colleagues and deal more sensitively with the organisation's client group
- Providing standardised training can ensure consistency in approach by different volunteers and continuity over time
- Training helps to minimise risk (for example, health and safety training)

#### Please note!

Some volunteers value the provision of training enormously, regarding it as an essential part and tangible benefit of their volunteering experience. In these cases, training will undoubtedly increase volunteer confidence and satisfaction. However, others may not see the need for training, or even if they do, they may find the idea very off-putting (possibly because it reminds them of unhappy school days). If this is the case, the need for training must be 'sold' with great sensitivity. In all instances, training must be well-planned and appropriate to the needs of organisation and to the needs of the individual volunteer.

#### Types of volunteer training

- **Induction training**
- **Further training**

#### Induction

Even if a volunteer is already highly skilled, induction (sometimes known as orientation) is essential. It is the process of preparing volunteers for a clear relationship with the organisation. It should make volunteers feel comfortable and ensure they better understand the organisation's history, ethos, structure and procedures, so that they will contribute more productively to the organisation's work.

Induction must provide answers to three questions:

- Why should I be working here? (what is the 'cause' all about?)
- How will I be working here? (what are the volunteer management systems?)
- Where do I fit in with everyone else? (what is the social environment in which I'll work?)

The problem of volunteers leaving an organisation soon after being recruited is often due to poor induction procedures. Induction must be relevant and interesting. Small group induction coupled with a volunteer handbook is often very effective.

## Further training

Volunteers will usually require training in the specifics of their role, both initially and on an ongoing basis, in order to perform their work successfully. This may consist of information-provision, skills-building and awareness-raising about attitudes. In the short-term, it is essential that the following message is effectively relayed to volunteers:

- This is what you do ...
- This is what you don't do ...
- If this happens, you do this ...
- For longer term and more experienced volunteers continuing education may be a way to develop personally, prepare for more responsibility, adapt to change and prevent burn-out.

## Training methods

Training comes in many guises. It may be done in-house, externally, or jointly with other organisations, and includes:

- on-the-job training
- practical demonstrations
- work shadowing
- buddying/mentoring systems
- visiting other organisations/inviting outside organisations in
- attending conferences, workshops, lectures, seminars etc
- role plays and simulations
- problem-solving exercises, group discussions, brainstorming, etc
- speakers and films at meetings
- once-off training sessions of varying lengths
- telephone conferencing
- linked or modular courses, consisting of several sessions over a period of time
- distance learning
- structured reading programmes.

It is recommended that a variety of techniques are used, which combine listening, discussing, observing and doing, as this will help to maintain attention and interest.

## Other issues to consider

It is sometimes helpful to develop an overall **training policy** for the organisation which includes volunteer training; alternatively, tackle the issue of volunteer training in your volunteer policy (including topics such as identifying training needs, eligibility, etc)

Increasing attention is now being paid to **accreditation** of volunteer training. If your volunteers are expected to complete a major training programme, this is well worth investigating. Always make sure any volunteer training is closely **monitored and evaluated**. There is no point devoting resources to something which is not proving worthwhile.

## Further reading

(all publications are available in the Volunteering Ireland reference library)

Community Education Training Unit, 1992, *Training and how not to panic: a practical guide to training skills*  
Lisa Conway, 1994, *Working with volunteers: training*

Patricia Harvey & Ginette Johnstone, 1992, *A book of case studies: for training volunteers*

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