

fact sheet 18

volunteer recruitment ...

basic recruitment

valuing volunteering

- **Anyone can volunteer**
- **65% of people who don't volunteer at present say they would be willing to use some of their spare time for voluntary work**

Powell, Fred & Guerin Donal, 1997, Civil society and social policy, University College Cork

Introduction

Getting enough of the right people is the most basic challenge of working with volunteers. Recruitment is an ongoing concern for every organisation; a constant turnover of volunteers is inevitable, as people's circumstances and their ability to volunteer change over time. An increasing number of organisations are now looking for people to help them on a voluntary basis, at the same time as the demands on individuals' free time are getting greater. Whilst it is true that volunteering rates have dropped slightly over the past few years, remember that most people who currently do not volunteer would consider doing so if they were asked.

Before you recruit

You need to be clear-sighted, creative and determined if you are going to be successful. It is essential to think strategically and to be prepared. You will have to devote some resources to recruitment, both in terms of time and money, and you will have to do some background research. You need to know:

- why you want volunteers
- what they will be doing (develop a simple 'role' description for each different volunteering role)
- what type of people you are looking for (develop a short person specification for each role)
- if and how you will select/screen potential volunteers
- how you will support them once they start volunteering with you.

Who should do it?

It is helpful to involve as many people as possible in the recruitment process and it may be appropriate to set up a recruitment team or subcommittee. It is essential that you involve current volunteers (if you have any) in the recruitment process. There is no reason why the person with overall responsibility for recruiting volunteers cannot be a volunteer, provided s/he is well-trained.

Marketing your organisation

Someone is unlikely to take the step of enquiring about volunteering with you immediately after first hearing about your organisation. Usually they need to have built up a positive mental image of you over time. It is therefore crucial that you promote your organisation on an ongoing basis and that you are professional in all aspects of your work. You must project the right image at all times, not just when recruiting volunteers. This does not mean you have to spend a lot of money on being 'high gloss'; it simply means doing the job you set out to do, and doing it well. Remember that you are competing with thousands of other agencies and that potential volunteers will need to be convinced about the worth of volunteering with your particular organisation (fortunately, this is completely subjective and will therefore differ for everybody). It should always be borne in mind that whilst public relations (PR) and volunteer recruitment are closely related, they are not the same. You cannot rely on PR to get you volunteers; you must ask people directly to volunteer with you.

Look at things from the perspective of the potential volunteer

It is easy to get so caught up in your day-to-day activities that you lose the ability to express what you do, or even why you do it, to people who do not know about your work. Never assume that people know anything. You must learn to take into account the potential volunteer's perspective if recruitment is going to be a success. Putting yourself forward as a volunteer can be daunting. Organisations should make it easy for people to volunteer, by being as approachable, undemanding and unbureaucratic as possible, and not to expect too much too soon. If you give people the opportunity for a trial period, or give them an easy job before progressing on to something more demanding, people are less likely to be scared off. What is it about the work that is likely to appeal to people? Is the work meaningful and will it be enjoyable? If the answer is 'no', you are unlikely to find volunteers. It is also important to remember that people volunteer for different reasons. If you can tap into what motivates different people, you can 'segment' the potential pool of volunteers and adapt your recruitment message accordingly.

The recruitment message

Always keep the message as clear, simple and upbeat as possible. Whenever you recruit, you should aim to impart the following information:

- what social or other need is the organisation trying to tackle?
- can the voluntary work offered help to meet this need/solve this problem?
- what does the voluntary work consist of?
- allay any fears that the potential volunteer may have ('I wouldn't be able to do that', 'why would they want me?', 'would it mean travelling home late at night?', etc)
- outline the benefits to the potential volunteer of working with you (new friends, training, making a difference, getting work experience, etc)
- how can the potential volunteer find out more; what is the next step they should take?

What technique should you use?

There is no one correct technique; creativity is the key and the limit is your imagination. The type of person you are looking for will inform what the appropriate recruitment medium is. For example, if you need to find a volunteer with specialist skills, such as a professionally qualified counsellor, you will have to target your methods much more than if you are simply looking for lots of 'bodies' to assist you in your fundraising event. Always think of where the type of people you are looking for are likely to be found. Also remember the general rule: the more people you reach through a certain medium and the less the personal contact, the lower the response rate is likely to be, and vice versa; the more you focus, the greater your chance of success. You will of course have to balance the resources you have available to you with the likely response you are going to get. Therefore do not miss any opportunities, especially free ones, of advertising the fact that you are recruiting volunteers. A final word of comfort: sincerity and belief in your cause will always win over technique!

Personal contact

The vast majority of volunteers are recruited by word of mouth, through existing volunteers, staff, clients, supporters and so on, so make sure everyone who is involved with your organisation is aware that you are trying to recruit volunteers. Consider running a brainstorming session identifying all the people your

organisation knows and/or ask people to introduce a friend or family member to the organisation. Potential volunteers can be approached face-to-face, over the telephone or in writing. Some organisations even try door-to-door recruitment, especially in their local area.

Print

Printed materials can be in the form of leaflets, flyers, posters, newsletters, postcards, and so on. Always keep them simple and clear, but at the same time make them attractive and eye-catching. Put them where people will see them, such as notice boards and leaflet dispensers in schools, colleges, universities, libraries, council offices, hospitals, doctors' and dentists' waiting rooms, sport centres, churches, shop windows, supermarkets, laundrettes, restaurants, bars, Citizens Information Centres, Youth Information Centres, community centres, etc. You could also hand them out in the street and at events, insert them into magazines/newsletters, and you could even try mailing materials directly to people. Well-resourced organisations can consider billboards, public transport advertising, advertising on the back of supermarket till receipts, etc.

Public speaking

Church groups, women's groups, active retirement associations and the like, are often looking for speakers, so accept invitations to contribute. In addition, you could approach employers (particularly large ones that run pre-retirement courses) and schools (particularly transition year students) and whoever else you can think of, and offer to do a talk about your work and to request volunteers. It is particularly compelling if one of your current volunteers speaks. It is important to be well-briefed, interesting and to consider what is likely to appeal to the group about volunteering with you. If you have a video or slides of your work, show them. Bring printed information to support your talk and details that people can take away with them.

Promotional events and exhibitions

If you have an exhibition which shows the work that you do, you could display it in-house or in a public space. If you have the resources, you could even do a 'road show' You could also have a recruitment stand in a shopping centre or library, at festivals or careers fairs, or at any other appropriate event. You could also consider having an open day at your organisation to which you invite members of your local community.

The media

Organisations should try for a steady stream of coverage in the media, especially the local media. This will involve building up a good relationship with people who may cover stories, including sending regular press releases, holding news conferences, providing photos and photo opportunities, sending letters to the editor, and so on. Organisations can also directly place recruitment advertisements in newspapers and magazines and/or do volunteer appeals on radio and television. The media includes:

- national, regional and local press (including the free press)
- specialist press (including other voluntary organisations' magazines and newsletters)
- national and local radio stations (including community radio)
- television (including cable).

Internet

If you have internet access, you can use your web page and e-mail as effective and cheap marketing and volunteer recruitment tools. In addition, there are various websites that you can exploit even if you do not have your own page. Examples include www.volunteeringireland.ie, www.activelink.ie and www.idealists.com.

Referrals and other sources

Volunteering Ireland operates a free volunteer placement service where organisations can register any volunteering opportunities that they have in the central Dublin area. Various other local volunteer centres offer similar services; contact Volunteering Ireland to see if there is a centre near you. Comhairle (01-605 9000, www.comhairle.ie) operates the social mentor scheme, in which it introduces skilled voluntary advisers to not-for-profit groups. Groups of employee volunteers from the corporate sector may be sourced through Business in the Community Ireland (01) 874 7232, www.bitc.ie). You may in addition get referrals from social workers, priests and other organisations. Sometimes, people will offer to volunteer with you 'on spec'; do you have mechanisms in place to deal with such requests, so that you can capitalise on each individual's talents and commitment?

What to do when people show an interest

Once you have implemented your chosen recruitment methods, you will start getting some enquiries. It is important that you follow these up quickly and professionally. Consider having an information pack ready, perhaps containing background information on your project, details of the voluntary work and an application form. Try to meet with potential volunteers as soon as possible after they first make contact.

And finally ...

Evaluate the success of your recruitment campaign so that you can learn for the future, what was and what was not successful. And remember - recruitment is only the beginning; keeping hold of volunteers is much harder! Volunteering Ireland can provide you with as much help as you need to recruit successfully, including more detailed information on any of the subjects raised in this fact sheet.

Further reading

(publications are available in the Volunteering Ireland reference library)

- Susan J Ellis, 1996, *The volunteer recruitment (and membership development) book*
- Steve McCurley & Rick Lynch, 1998, Chapter 5: 'Volunteer recruitment' in *Essential volunteer management*
- National Centre for Volunteering, 1999, *The recruitment guide*
- David R Smith, 1994, *Working with volunteers: recruitment and selection*

October 05

volunteering ireland

Coleraine House
Coleraine Street
Dublin 7, Ireland
t (+353 1) 872 2622
f (+353 1) 872 2623
e info@volunteeringireland.ie
w www.volunteeringireland.ie