

ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENT

St Paul's metaphor of the church as the Body of Christ reminds us that all the parts of the body have their own important function. Valuing and nurturing all volunteer roles, however small, is one way of honouring every member of a community so that, as well as getting the task done well, people volunteering can flourish and grow.

Making sure that there are suitable opportunities for people to serve is one of the ways in which churches can encourage people to develop and mature as disciples, as well as building a community where all are valued. For some people, becoming a volunteer can be part of a conscious desire for development and it is often through activities and group involvement that individuals grow and learn.

Starting points

In order to decide what development will be appropriate, it is important to think about the starting point for both the task and the volunteer undertaking it.

1

Tasks and roles vary

- There are times when people will fill a 'gap' on a one-off basis, and where long term plans for training and development are not necessarily relevant.
- For other roles, or where a role is being taken on for the first time, a planned induction is valuable.
- Some roles involve tasks where following specific guidance is important, e.g. volunteers working with children or vulnerable adults.

2

Volunteers vary

- To enable any person to develop, a key principle is to recognise their existing experience and their particular hopes and needs, hopes and needs, including:
- different reasons for volunteering
 - different skills and experiences
 - different needs in terms of levels of support and types of appropriate development.

Practicalities

It is useful to have a chat early on with those who volunteer. Any information you find out can be invaluable for thinking of ways to help people grow and develop through their volunteering.

1**It is helpful to be aware of these issues during a discussion:**

- What do people think they will find easy to do? What might they need a bit of support with? Are there things they are terrified of tackling? This sort of initial benchmark can be really helpful to find out early on, even though people don't necessarily identify themselves accurately!
- It can also be useful to ascertain the ways in which different individuals are likely to learn best – whether by just getting on with an activity, or by having more theoretical understanding of the role or expectations.
- Check what are each volunteer's specific expectations and hopes: otherwise it is easy to make assumptions. Sometimes a volunteer may assume you will want them to stay for ever, so may need permission to say that they want to volunteer in order to go on to something else. Similarly, sometimes people feel that you expect them to know everything right from the start and need reassuring that you don't expect that to be the case.

2**It is also useful to remember that there are various different reasons why people offer to volunteer**

Reasons might include:

- so that they can use a skill or gift they already have in the service of the Church and community
- to develop their abilities
- to lead on to other opportunities e.g. by improving their CV
- to use their time profitably during unemployment or retirement
- to give them a new social network

Support and Development needs

Offering appropriate development opportunities can involve finding a delicate balance. Some people volunteering may start with a lot of experience or knowledge gained elsewhere and may feel patronised by simplistic training.

Some people just want to do a particular task, are not focused on development and could feel pressurised if you keep trying to develop them.

It is valuable to remember:

- Volunteering can be a route into developing confidence and self-esteem for many people.
- For some, the provision of training may be a way of demonstrating that the church or organisation takes their ministry / role seriously and invests in it.
- Some may feel anxious about their ability to fulfil a role and will need support either to learn what is involved or simply to be reassured that they are capable and valued.
- Some people may outgrow particular roles or get bored and for them development means a new challenge. They may be helped by moving to a new role, or taking on more responsibility within a role (e.g. sorting out rotas / leading sessions / mentoring or buddying others).

Support and training when people begin

Giving people the opportunity to make a good start when taking on a new task lays the foundations for future effectiveness. For some tasks, there will be individuals who need minimal induction, whilst others will need more support and might need the induction done over a longer period.

Induction includes enabling volunteers to understand their role in context and how the task contributes to the aims, outreach and mission of the Church or organisation. It is an opportunity to establish who will be the key person to provide support and their role in providing guidance. It is also an opportunity to establish that volunteers have permission to ask questions and contribute ideas.

Some approaches will be informal, and others more formal. Some of the decisions you make will be pragmatic - is it easier to do introductory sessions on pre-booked dates or to just see people individually as they are ready? Is a volunteer likely to value written information to refer back to, or will they find it easier to have a more verbal introduction? Whatever you do, it has to be manageable for you and useful for the volunteer. Below are some suggestions.

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Support and training when people begin (continued)

Some suggestions for getting volunteers started

1

One to one chat or discussion

People could be offered written information, followed by an opportunity to meet to discuss and clarify.

2

Group Sessions

These can be useful when a person starts a volunteering role. As well as using sessions during induction training, they can be helpful for ongoing development or building a team.

3

Doing the role alongside another first

'Buddying' a new volunteer with an established volunteer, for example, can help ease a new volunteer in and help develop an existing volunteer.

4

A trial opportunity or period

This can give someone the chance to try a role so that both you and they can then see whether it suits them.

If you do have a trial period, make sure that it's clear when it has ended so that the volunteer knows they are now considered to be an established part of the team – this is a chance to affirm them.

5

Alongside a role description, a mutual expectations document can clarify the expectations of a mutually beneficial relationship right from the outset

See *Mutual Expectations Template* for a sample to adapt.

On-going support and development

For those undertaking specific roles over a longer period of time, more formal developmental opportunities could be appropriate, but some approaches will be more formal than others.

In the church there have been various roles where people are familiar with a pattern of front loading training for a role, and then authorising (or ordaining / commissioning/ licensing) them to do it. This can mean that on-going development training or support may be given less attention than could be valuable for the volunteer's ongoing development.

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On-going support and development (continued)

Some suggestions for ongoing development

1 Meetings with individuals or a group where you review how things are going

These can include opportunities to report back or discuss ways in which shared tasks can be improved, and ask questions etc. These gatherings could be formal, or semi-social and involve a meal.

2 Having a mentor

Various definitions exist for mentor or buddy so make sure that understandings are shared.

3 Team gatherings with a training focus

This might be formal training or a session to discuss specific questions or look at a case study.

4 Finding specialist expertise to help people do the role and develop

Think about other organisations or partners who offer opportunities for training (e.g. volunteer bureaux or organisations with specific expertise). Training could be offered to participants from several churches or projects. (Note that training offered to volunteers has to be relevant to their role otherwise it can be seen as a form of payment.)

5 Taking time out together for theological discussion and reflection

This can give all an opportunity to consider how the work being done is rooted in Christian faith.

6 Arranging a visit or short term placement

This could help a volunteer see how a similar task is undertaken in a different place or context.

7 Arranging formal task-focussed supervision from a specialist

This will be particularly important for certain roles that may be undertaken by volunteers, e.g. counselling.

8 A regular review (e.g. annually) with each volunteer

There is huge value for everyone in having a recognised opportunity to ask specific questions, and identify ongoing development opportunities. This can be a useful opportunity for you to discover how things are going and draw out responses you might not have expected.

“Volunteers who are appropriately supported are more effective in their role and are thus able to help secure better outcomes for the individuals and communities with whom they work. Equally, volunteers whose own development needs are addressed are better equipped to progress into further learning, volunteering or paid work” (Community Learning and Volunteering – NIACE 2014)