

TACKLING SPECIFIC DIFFICULTIES

When differences arise, there are almost limitless options for finding a way forward: the ideas below are just some suggestions. You will know your volunteers best and what works with one person or group might be something you would never do with another. It is helpful for work with volunteers to include opportunities for open and honest conversation, which offers you the chance to notice, hear and reflect on what is happening.

ISSUE	SOME POSSIBLE RESPONSES
<p>Volunteer not doing what they were asked to do</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Notice what they are doing. Compliment them on the things they are doing well. Ask them about anything that they aren't doing – and take it from there. ■ If they have a role description – or similar – then you can review that with them to find out what they enjoy doing and what they don't. ■ Are they in the right role? Could they try a different role or could this role be adapted to suit them better? ■ Is there some additional support they may need to be able to fulfil the role?
<p>Volunteer is operating in a way that isn't working</p> <p>(e.g. not turning up when expected, not operating cooperatively, not doing the things that are part of their role etc.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 'How are things.....?' Check if the person is enjoying the role. Start with a completely open question and if that doesn't elicit an answer then possibly give an indication of why you were concerned about them. ■ Work out what the problem is – Swap the rota around so that you or someone else can do some sessions alongside the person to learn more about what is going on. ■ Additional support/training – Arrange for them to shadow someone else to learn more about the role. ■ Group sessions – A session with all volunteers to consider why the task is important will not focus criticism on one individual and can enable all volunteers to share ideas of how to makes things work well. ■ Refer to the <i>role description or a mutual expectations document</i> if you have one. This could help you to have a conversation about expectations in the role.

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<p>Volunteer constantly negative</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Are they alright? Are there other things going on for them – do they need a bit more individual attention? ■ Meet and ask them about whether they enjoy the role – this may be done informally over a cup of tea. You may discover that they do enjoy it! You can then explore what things frustrate them and whether they are things that can be changed or not. It may be that they would prefer another role and that this one isn't working for them anymore. ■ Sometimes some dedicated time really listening to them can defuse things and help put relationships on a more positive footing. ■ Sometimes it's worth explicitly reminding volunteers to come to you with problems so that you can help with a solution rather than people grumbling to one another.
<p>Relatively new volunteer makes a suggestion about something that could be done differently</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Try the listen, respond, reflect, consult, decide, communicate process as outlined in <i>Tackling Difficulties</i>. ■ If it's simple and uncontroversial and you think it might make a positive improvement, making suggested changes demonstrates that you value your volunteers and their views. ■ If you think the idea needs more thought then you could let the volunteer know that you'll ensure there is an opportunity to raise it in the next meeting if appropriate. There could then be an open discussion, allowing all volunteers to share their views.
<p>Volunteer/s not being welcoming to a new volunteer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ask the 'unfriendly' volunteer how they think the new person is getting on. This can then lead into a conversation where you have a chance to affirm how important it is to help someone settle in, be able to ask questions, feel part of the team etc. ■ Consider whether you could have a meeting/training session where you get the volunteers together and include activities that split people into groups/pairs and give opportunities for new volunteer to contribute in a structured environment. ■ Possibly have a social session where volunteers have a chance to get together.

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<p>A new volunteer has experience from another place but the existing volunteers appear to feel threatened</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Talk to the volunteer about why some of their suggestions worked in that other place- spend time listening attentively and also help them reflect about how the new context might be different – taking it seriously but helping them to analyse and recognise the differences. ■ Look at the rota. Find someone confident and well established and pair them up so that the new volunteer can be affirmed by someone who doesn't feel threatened and the established volunteer can help the new volunteer settle into the different context and tease out which ideas might transfer and which might not.
<p>A volunteer with a strong personality is becoming dominant in the group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Actively look for opportunities to ask others in the group to take a lead. ■ Re-establish the parity of the group. Perhaps in a meeting or event that gets feedback, ensuring that whatever questions are asked of the group you then take feedback in a structured way that gives everyone a chance to speak rather than defaulting to the usual suspects.
<p>A volunteer in a public role talks about people negatively and audibly (e.g. at a Drop-in or welcoming people to services)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ If you are around when it happens then a clear look or a gentle comment might be enough to highlight that the volunteer has strayed away from their role. You need to judge whether this has hit home though. ■ 'I was surprised to hear...' could be a good opener for a conversation. ■ Find the chance (or pre-arrange it) to have a chat directly with that volunteer. Make them aware that you have heard them making comments, refer them back to the purpose of the role and make it clear that negative judgements are not part of that – and why.

If you have suggestions of other common scenarios or solutions that you are happy to share, please send them to julia.hill@cuf.org.uk