

TAKING ON VOLUNTEERS

One of the distinctive things about recruiting in a church context is that you are often recruiting volunteers who are already known to you and part of your church community, rather than people joining you to fulfil a specific role. This fluidity is very positive in many ways, but it is worth bearing in mind that if things go wrong it can be particularly challenging.

It is worth the effort to consider how you recruit people to the right roles in the first place. This can help to ensure that volunteers have a good experience, loving relationships are maintained and the tasks get done.

Starting points

For a church based project you may have a ready source of volunteers or you may want to look more widely. One consideration is whether a role actually requires the volunteer to be an active Christian or member of your congregation or whether you could cast your net more widely as a part of your outreach into and involvement with the community.

When finding volunteers, an immediate concern may be filling a rota or getting a task done. However you also want volunteers to flourish in their role, develop as individuals and to enable Christians to grow in their discipleship. People have "gifts that differ" (as St Paul reminded the early church), and you want to empower volunteers to use the gifts that God has given them.

Volunteering can also be an opportunity for people to take on a role and discover a gift that had not previously been obvious to them, so recruiting volunteers may not always be about finding people who are already highly competent. It can be helpful for the growth of individuals and church communities to look for opportunities to involve people in ways that will enable them to participate and develop.

Sometimes the focus of volunteering will be on the volunteer's opportunity for development rather than on getting a task done. It may be that volunteering can help someone develop confidence, enhance their CV or that involvement in volunteering can help them develop skills. This type of volunteering can be hugely beneficial for all concerned but requires you to be able to invest energy and time in making it work.

On the next page there are some key points to consider when a volunteer takes on a new role.

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Starting points (continued)

Before a volunteer takes on a new role there are 3 key areas to consider:

1

What are they going to do?

- Do you have a task or role that you have already identified needs doing?
- Alternatively, has someone come to you offering a skill or wanting to do something new?
- Are there ways of involving people so that everyone has the opportunity to participate?

Whichever is the starting point, some exploration of what might be involved is going to be necessary to clarify what will be done.

3

What are the practical considerations?

- Does the role need to be done at a particular time or place?
- Do you have the right support in place to help things work successfully?
- Have you clarified practicalities such as travel expenses?

2

How will you match people to suitable roles?

- How will you find out about people's existing skills and experience or their potential to develop into new roles?
- What will you do if someone wants to take on a role for which they don't appear to be suited?
- How will you support people who have the potential to develop through a role but are not yet ready to take full responsibility for it?

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Practicalities

The practicalities of recruiting volunteers will depend on your starting points and on how formal your set-up is but there are a number of questions that you may find it helpful to ask.

Not all questions will apply everywhere but considering in advance appropriate responses in your situation will be helpful.

1

Do you have a specific task that needs doing?

See *Clarifying Tasks* for guidance on defining a clear volunteer role

2

Does the task have any particular requirements?

Identifying these will help you work out where you might find people who are likely to be well-suited to the task

- Does it require particular skills? If so, where might you find someone with those skills?
- Does it need to be done at a particular time? If so, who might be available at those times?
- Does it need to be done in a particular place or could it be done by someone at home?
- Does it need to be done by a practising Christian or could this be an opportunity for outreach into the wider community?
- Does it need to be taken on as a long term commitment or is it the sort of thing that people can dip in and out of?
- Does it require a DBS check? (Safeguarding check for some types of work involving children or vulnerable adults. This was formerly a CRB check)

3

Do you need someone to help immediately, soon, or are you planning ahead?

This will have an impact on where it makes sense to look for volunteers. If you need someone to stack the chairs tomorrow you aren't going to advertise in the local paper!

4

Will you be able to pay any out of pocket expenses?

For example can travel expenses be claimed? This may not be common in a local church where many people are within walking distance but it can affect who is able to afford to volunteer.

5

How will you let people know you need volunteers?

- Where might you 'advertise' for volunteers? See *Taking On Volunteers - Sources* for suggestions
- How can you be positive and specific about what needs to be done, avoiding a generic appeal for volunteers?
- Do people who are not members of your church or organisation know that you exist and what you do? If not, how can you raise awareness so that it's easier to attract volunteers now and in the future?

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Practicalities (continued)

6

What will happen if someone is interested?

- Have you made it easy for someone to let you know that they are interested in volunteering?
- Is there someone coordinating the search for volunteers for a particular task so that things don't get confused?
- If you have quite a formal structure and might have lots of enquiries, will you use an enquiry form?

7

What will you do if someone is interested in volunteering to do something but the role may not be right for them?

- Do you have a process that will help everyone judge whether or not the role matches the individual concerned? For example a trial period, a training course, an informal interview etc.
- Will you say no to someone if they are not suitable? If so, how? If not, how will you support them or adapt the task to make it work?
- Can you offer an alternative role that would suit them?

8

How will a volunteer know what is expected of them?

- Is there a description (written or verbal) of what is involved and why it matters? For more information see *Clarifying the task*
- When the volunteer starts, how will you introduce them to anything they need to know? (e.g. informal starting chat, some written instructions, buddying with existing volunteer, structured induction). For more information see *Encouraging Development*
- How will you establish what expectations are involved on both sides? For ways of clarifying expectations see *Mutual Expectations Template and Volunteer Role Card + Mutual Expectations*

8

How will you approach things if someone gradually takes on regular volunteering tasks?

- This may be someone who begins by attending something and then offers casual help that grows into regular involvement. This can be a common and very positive situation both for churches and activities like Drop-ins.
- How will you encourage involvement and still cover any important information or guidance that they might need?

Whether you plan a formal recruitment or a more informal system, it can be helpful to use a checklist to avoid forgetting something. *The Taking On Volunteers – Checklist* may be a helpful starting point.