

racism
fascism
nationalism

Working with volunteers

Most anti-discrimination initiatives start as volunteer initiatives. When they start, there is no volunteer management, because who would manage who? The organisation is small, and everyone pulls together for the same goal. As the organisation grows, goals tend to shift and people take part for different reasons. After a while the organisation reaches a point where everyone has to stop taking action and take some time to figure out how to go on. That is the exact point at which volunteer management should be figured out as well.

You need to think about:

- Recruitment
- Relationship
- Resources
- Rewards
- How do you find your volunteers?
- What kind of a relationship do you build with them?
- How do you develop their resources?
- How do you reward them for their hard work?

Volunteer management is about thinking ahead. You need to figure out what to do before you have twenty enthusiastic new volunteers at your doorstep. This leaflet aims at helping you figure it out.

managing young talents

Trends in volunteering

In the different countries of Europe, there are different understandings about volunteering. That is a good thing, because with all those different experiences, there should be an answer to almost every question. Trends are often not felt the same way in the different countries, but let's try to identify some of them anyway.

flexibility and diversity

There is not one profile for volunteering. People expect that you value their time. And their time schedule gets more flexible: many people do not work at the same job all their lives and many people do not work from 9 to 5. In many countries, the population has become more and more diverse over the years, and so has the volunteer population. In short: the needs, ideas and talents of volunteers are diverse. The best volunteer associations take this into account. This new diversity also creates some problems: different people have different ways of handling problems, and of discussing future plans and they certainly have a different sense of humour. The best volunteer associations have ways of dealing with conflict resulting from this.

volunteering as a step into the future

In many countries volunteering is seen as a great way of taking steps to find a paid job. Many volunteers now see volunteering also as a way to learn specific skills. There is no shame in this. The best volunteer associations find out what the volunteer wants to get out of the experience and try to accommodate these wishes.

Recruitment

Putting up signs saying 'volunteers wanted' may still work in some cases, but in most cases you will have to be much more specific. Thinking about recruitment ahead of time wins already half the battle.

the recruitment circle: it goes on and on

Recruitment has to be on the agenda all the time. When a volunteer wants to stop volunteering, see it as part of the recruiting. What can this volunteer tell you about how your volunteering policies work? If this means a change is necessary, do not wait until you need volunteers again to implement it. Volunteers will not stay with you for ever. The best recruiters are satisfied volunteers. So engage volunteers to help you find other volunteers.

defining tasks

Are you sure you need general volunteers? Or do you need voluntary telephone staff, volunteer project organisers, volunteer hosts/hostesses, volunteer chauffeurs, etc. Defining specific functions and tasks will help you find the right people for the right job. Try and write down everything you do, sorted by tasks. Think of the kind of people you would need to do those tasks. Don't be afraid to use your imagination: what image do you have of these volunteers? Would they be students, or people who have retired from their jobs? Can you imagine where you would find people that would be good at those specific tasks? Think of education institutions, but also of corporations, or of fellow organisations.

what is your message?

What attracts a volunteer to work for you? Usually it is not the words 'volunteers wanted'. What do you think a volunteer could get from the job in this specific position?

Look at your message (applies to mouth-to-mouth publicity as well as written leaflets or posters) and check if it includes answers to the following questions:

- Exactly, what does the job entail?
- Why is it important, and to whom?
- What makes it interesting to the volunteer?

half of all volunteers has been asked to help out

In the age of the internet and mass media we often think we need to advertise to attract people. Still, most studies show that over half of all active volunteers have been asked to come and help out. Talk to everyone involved in your organisation about recruitment. They all need to know the message you want to send out. They are part of the recruitment strategy.

partners: schools, companies, other organisations

Besides your volunteers and activists, you can also explore the possibility of working with other actors within society. Think of projects involving local schools and their students: can they help you set up a multicultural festival? Think of companies that have a lot of employees that fit the profile of the volunteers you are looking for or that have a company identity that might fit well with what you are trying to achieve. It is often harder to get the PR people to listen to you than to involve individual employees first. Does anyone know an employee? Does your brother work at an interesting company? What about other organisations that work on other topics, but that might agree on your issues? There are good examples of organisations helping each other out in a variety of ways. And

your organisation could refer volunteers that would like a change to other organisations. Ask those organisations to do the same, and refer people to you. Why lose a volunteer to volunteering altogether when they could be happy at another job, at another organisation? Volunteer organisations could work together much more on keeping their volunteers happy and interested.

Relationship

Volunteers do not get money for their efforts. What they do get is a certain relationship to your organisation. This is your currency. This is your bargaining tool. Make sure you work to keep the relationship in order.

introduction

The first days and week are difficult at any new job. A volunteer is vulnerable when he/she does not know what is going on. Prepare the introduction of new volunteers. Take care that they have a full explanation of the organisation, its vision and its mission. If they are interested they should be able to get to know more about the working plan in the coming year(s). Make sure they know who does what and introduce them to everyone they will be working with, especially the director, president and/or the executive board.

Prepare a folder with all the information a volunteer needs, including: phone list, rules for declarations, what to do in case of inappropriate behaviour of colleagues, practical directions for answering the phone, opening/closing the office, sending mail, etc.

formal relations

Some organisations chose to formalise their relationship with their volunteer by establishing a volunteering contract. Whether you want to do this or not depends on what is the usual way to do it in your country, your experience, or your line of work. But even if you do not sign a contract, it is useful to sit down together to make it clear what you expect from one another. Write down your agreements, even when you don't make a contract out of them.

Part of your agreement should be what a volunteer can learn. Some voluntary associations work with volunteer portfolios, in which a volunteer collects proof of what he or she has learned: a certificate of a training course or conference, a leaflet that he or she designed, a signed statement on social abilities like chairing a meeting or making a report, references etc. Volunteering is a way of learning. Employers take such non-formal or informal education more and more serious. Portfolios only work if they are the responsibility of the volunteer. You should only help in filling it when and where asked. However, a portfolio needs to be introduced and explained to volunteers as a possibility when they start working.

checking up

It is easy to let the year pass without checking up on volunteers. And if you do not hear complaints, everything is alright, right? Actually, things do not have to go wrong to require maintenance. Schedule regular meetings with your volunteers. Make a list beforehand to check if you are on the same page about what the job means to the organisation and to the volunteer, to see if there are any ways things could go better, to see if the volunteer would like to learn skills, to see if they would like to try something new.

breaking up

There may be a hundred reasons why a volunteer wants to stop. Some of those reasons will have something to do with your organisation and the way the job is organised. Most volunteers stop for personal reasons. Everyone will feel better when you take as much care to say goodbye to a volunteer as to get him/her started. Make sure you take the time to sit with them to discuss why they are leaving, and ask them what they have learned and what the organisation could learn from their leaving. Ask them how they want to say goodbye and ask them whether they would be interested in other tasks with you, or with another organisation. Some organisations keep a database of people that do not volunteer regularly anymore, but that would be glad to help out incidentally.

Resources

For voluntary associations the volunteers bring resources. They may go beyond the specific tasks they are doing at a particular moment.

using what is there

When you have trouble solving a problem, think about involving the volunteers. They have their own network, which may include someone or something that could help.

In order to use what is there, you need to know what is there. Ask volunteers about their background when they start.

If volunteers are ambitious to learn, see if you can satisfy them. You can send them on delegations to interesting conferences, see if they can spend a day with someone who already does a task they are interested in. You could also ask ex-volunteers to help new volunteers for a short while to develop their talent in a specific area.

sharp eyes

New volunteers know your organisation, but are not as tied up in it as paid employees or the initiators. New volunteers especially have a good view of what your organisation looks like from the outside. Use that knowledge. Ask a group of new volunteers to assess the organisation, both its internal policies (especially where they pertain to volunteering) and its public face. Discuss the report of this discussion in your future planning.

valuing the work

Volunteering is often ignored in official reports. Make sure that volunteers, their work and the results they have achieved are mentioned prominently in your annual report. Think about including them in your budget, both on the expense and the income side. What they donate is valuable! Why shouldn't that be more visible?

If you value the work, you should make it as easy as possible. Think about adequate work places, a speedy payment of travel expenses, and, if possible, child care. If one volunteer watches the children, ten parents can help you do a task.

Are volunteers just cheap labour, or do they bring something extra? If you can think of a good answer, make sure that your volunteers know about it. In many hospitals, for example, volunteers bring the humanity that nurses sometimes cannot give. In political parties volunteers bring in the concerns of people in the streets, so they keep the party alive and focused on the outside instead of on the inside. Some organisations experience that volunteers bring a different sort of motivation and enjoyment to the workplace. Your organisation probably also has a reason that is not financial.

Rewards

Voluntary work is not rewarded by a pay check. But it does and it should provide something valuable to volunteers.

rewards and motivation

We already reviewed some possible rewards, including learning opportunities. But the best reward is one that fits exactly with the reason why a person does voluntary work. Someone who says: "The smiling faces of the children in the hospital are why I do the job", will be rewarded best by a handpainted picture by one of the kids. Be flexible and take time to be a little creative. Some examples: a party for all the volunteers, the same christmas card as the paid employees, a deal with a sponsor who lets volunteers shop at a reduced price in its stores, all the employees write a little thank you note to each volunteer.

volunteering is hard work

One way of rewarding your volunteers is taking their safety seriously. Although it is not always possible to attain high standards, every organisation should strive for a healthy and safe work place. If possible, this should include insurance. This works differently in each country. Make sure volunteers do not work too much or too late at night. They need to be protected a little from their own enthusiasm, from time to time. Safety also means that a volunteer has a place to go to, when clients or patients or coworkers bother them in some way, e.g. make discriminatory remarks or engage in some form of sexual harassment.

Or surf to... www.worldvolunteerweb.org • www.volunteering.co • www.energizeinc.com

Designing an action plan on volunteering

You've just received lots of tips, but how do you start making changes? On the UNITED website (look under publications) you find a check list that you could use to design an action plan. How to proceed?

- **Step 1:** Ask a group of people to go through the list with you, different eyes interpret the situation differently
- **Step 2:** Discuss the facts: do you have these actions in place already?
- **Step 3:** Decide on which points you want to take action in the future.
- **Step 4:** Prioritise the actions by attaching dates to each action.
- **Step 5:** Decide who should take the initiative on an action.

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