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Getting volunteers on board

How to find potential volunteers

Most volunteers are recruited by word of mouth - through friends, relatives or colleagues. This means that it is important that volunteers have a good experience with your organisation. Word of mouth is a powerful tool – volunteers who have a good experience with your organisation are great ambassadors, but similarly volunteers who have a poor experience will not be singing your praises!

However word of mouth is only one way, and the down side is that you tend to be less likely to recruit a really diverse pool of volunteers. This can mean that your organisation begins to stagnate, so to avoid this it is best to use a variety of methods of recruitment.

You could try using posters, leaflets, presentations or electronic media. Or why not make a direct approach to organisations who already work with people you want to reach. For example make use of schools, colleges, local clubs/societies or specialist volunteer 'broker' services who can link you up with people who have the professional skills you need.

For contact details of some specialist volunteer brokers, including those that target young people or people with specific professional or technical expertise see **Sheet 20 'How to find out more'**.

Make use of the free advertising service offered by Volunteer Centres. As well as local promotion, they can also get your opportunities online at www.do-it.org.uk. For contact details of your nearest Volunteer Centre, see **Sheet 18 'How can Volunteer Centres help'**.

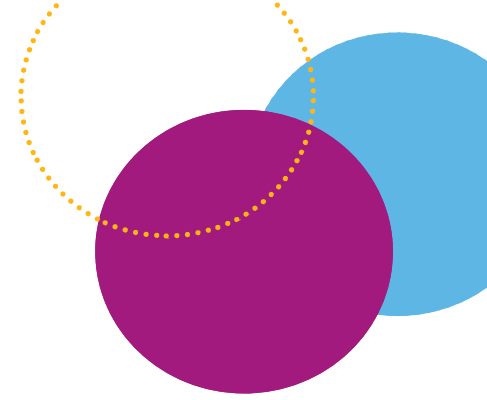
What happens when a potential volunteer gets in touch?

It is important to respond quickly, because the volunteer is offering you their valuable time. There are thousands of things they could choose to do with that time, so treat it as a gift. Any unexplained delay looks like a lack of courtesy to a potential volunteer, and they will easily be put off by this.

The initial contact needs to be friendly, welcoming and keen. It need not be the person who will supervise the volunteer if someone else (e.g. the administrator) is more easily available – but whoever it is needs to be well-informed, approachable, able to answer questions and tell the enquirer what will happen next.

It is unrealistic to expect every expression of interest to result in an actual volunteer. Be prepared to give people the chance to find out more about you before they can make an informed choice. The initial recruitment process is as much about the volunteer deciding if the role is right for them, as it is about you deciding if the volunteer is right for the role.

If there is a vetting process (such as taking up references, Vetting and Barring Scheme registration or Criminal Record Bureau checks) then take time to explain what is involved, what information will be needed and why you need it.



Recruiting volunteers is usually quite different to recruiting paid staff and it is helpful to be aware of some of the differences before you begin:

Paid staff:

- **Competitive process for applicants** involving the selection of one candidate over the others - and most people need a job
- In most cases the process aims to reject all but the successful candidate
- Often time-limited, with a fixed deadline for applications

Volunteers:

- **Competitive process for organisations** with many opportunities available. Volunteers are able to be choosy – and they don't **need** to volunteer at all
- In most cases, the process needs to attract and retain as many suitable volunteers as possible, not just one
- Often an ongoing process where volunteers may apply at any time