



Barriers to Volunteering

Why don't more people volunteer? What might put someone off from contacting an organisation or why do some people seem to lose interest after making an initial enquiry?

If they do start volunteering, what makes them stop? Why do so many organisations work with volunteers from very narrow sections of society? Often potential volunteers run into barriers which can relate to their perceptions of volunteering or can be caused by a lack of information.

People might expect volunteering to be a time-consuming activity or worry that they lack the right experience. They might worry that they cannot afford the travel costs or be concerned that volunteering could affect their entitlement to social security benefits.

These are examples of perceived or practical barriers to volunteering. If your organisation wants to attract and involve more volunteers from across the community, this section will help you to spot potential barriers and find ways to work around them. Thinking about the benefits for your organisation will help you to plan for greater diversity. This section also suggests how you can support volunteers once they are with you, as well as ways of recognising and rewarding their contribution to your organisation. What kinds of barriers might stop people from volunteering?

Perceived barriers - Time commitment

Some people expect volunteering to take up large chunks of time each week or think that only retired people or part-time workers have time to volunteer.

Your organisation could estimate the likely weekly commitment and include this in publicity materials used to recruit volunteers or let people know that they need only volunteer for an afternoon a week for example. However, you should be careful not to specify a minimum required time commitment as this could risk creating a contractual relationship. You can phrase this to we would ask a minimum of a certain amount of hours each week/month etc.

Organisations can think about designing different kinds of volunteering roles to suit different lifestyles. Depending on the tasks involved, you can also create taster days or one-off volunteering days to get people involved.



Volunteering not valued

Volunteering may be seen as a one-sided activity for 'do-gooders'. Unpaid work is sometimes viewed as unskilled work or not worth doing if it isn't going to pay the bills. This is not true, volunteers have many talents and skills some do not even recognise this in themselves until they are given the opportunity to try.

Volunteering is a mutually beneficial activity so organisations can emphasise the satisfaction or skills or new friends that a volunteer will gain. You could invite current volunteers to act as advocates or champions at recruitment events or include stories about their experiences in your publicity materials.

Lack of skills

Volunteering can be a great way to learn new skills and build on existing ones, but potential volunteers might worry that they lack the necessary skills from the start.

Organisations generally offer training to their volunteers, whether this is through a formal course or just explaining tasks on a one-to-one basis. You can reassure potential volunteers by giving a clear description of the tasks involved and by mentioning training opportunities in your recruitment materials. Training should however be related to the work the volunteers are doing and should not be given as a perk.

Pigeon-holing of roles



People often expect to be offered traditional roles and can be put off by this.

Do you automatically offer caring roles to women or practical roles to men without being aware of it? Also, avoid pigeon-holing by background, for example by always matching Asian volunteers to an Asian client group.

Be ready to create new challenges in your volunteering and take the time to chat with new volunteers to find out what they are interested in. It's also good to be prepared to help a volunteer try out a few different roles if the first one doesn't suit them.

Over-formality

Potential volunteers can be discouraged by formal recruitment procedures such as completing a long registration form or attending an interview. These can be daunting for people with learning needs or English as a second language. HVC can assist volunteers with this to try and speed up the recruitment process. This can be discussed and tailor made for each organisational need. If you want HVC to assist in this please contact for more details.

Organisations sometimes forget to develop different recruitment procedures for volunteers and staff. If you do use registration forms, only request information which is necessary. For example, you might simply need to know that someone meets a minimum age limit for insurance purposes, rather than asking their exact date of birth.

You might even decide not to use registration forms and note down the important details during an introductory chat with a new volunteer.



Practical Barriers



Expenses.

Research shows that people on a low income are less likely to volunteer. This may be because they cannot afford to be left out of pocket. If at all possible, all reasonable expenses should be reimbursed. It is important to pay out-of-pocket expenses only, for which your volunteers should give you receipts and bus/train tickets. Giving your volunteers flat rate expenses (e.g.: giving volunteers a standard 2.50 for lunch) could be seen as income by the Job Centre and HM Revenue and Customs. Remember that the cost of travelling and a meal eaten out is significant to someone on social security benefits or a low income. It is important to be flexible when paying expenses and try to pay them in cash on a frequent basis.

Childcare or other caring responsibilities

Having children or dependants should not be a barrier to volunteering.

Think creatively about how to create other family-friendly opportunities. You could offer volunteering opportunities with flexible hours or consider whether volunteering from home would work.

Transport

Inaccessibility of transport can be a major barrier for potential volunteers.

People with disabilities or those living in rural areas can have particular difficulties in arranging and paying for transport to and from their voluntary activity.

Wherever possible reimburse travel costs such as bus/train fares.

Remember that people with disabilities may need extra notice about their volunteering as it can take them time to organise transport in advance.



Top Tip

Volunteers can claim 41p a mile for car usage

&

20p a mile for bike usage

Barriers affecting certain groups

Entitlement to benefits - People receiving benefits are often uncertain of the rules around volunteering. It's often important to reassure them that they can volunteer and help them to understand the relevant rules.

Volunteering should not affect Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), Income Support, Incapacity Benefit or ESA. There are no restrictions on the amount of time people can volunteer.

People receiving Jobseekers Allowance should be aware that they have to remain both available for and actively seeking work. This means that as an organisation you may have to give your volunteers some flexibility to attend Jobcentre meetings or job interviews.

The benefits rules also state that volunteers receiving any of the benefits mentioned above should tell their Jobcentre or social security office if they do any voluntary work. Your organisation could provide a standard letter for volunteers to use when informing the Jobcentre or social security office. A volunteer may need to give your organisations telephone number to the Jobcentre so that they are easily contactable for interviews. See page 20 & 21 for standard letters for Jobcentres.

People seeking asylum

Asylum seekers (people in the process of applying for refugee status) have been allowed to volunteer since April 2000. This includes while they are appealing against a decision to refuse them asylum. They are issued with document IS96, which states that they are not allowed to take up paid or unpaid work. The Home Office have confirmed that this restriction does not include volunteering.

Volunteering can provide a good opportunity to integrate into the local community and improve their English language skills in particular.

See Asylum Seekers and Refugees section on Page 27 for more information.

Criminal records

Having a criminal record need not be a barrier to volunteering. Since one in five adult men have a criminal conviction, it is important not to automatically exclude this significant group of potential volunteers.

Only in special cases, such as care of vulnerable clients or handling large sums of money, should relevant convictions be taken into account.

Depending on the volunteer role, an organisation should screen its potential volunteers through a DBS Check. The need to screen will depend entirely on what the volunteer is doing and the client group that they are working with.

If checks are required, it is fairest to let people know this from the outset. You should briefly explain the process to a potential volunteer and make it clear that having a conviction does not mean that they are automatically unsuitable.

It is also important to ensure that new volunteers are kept involved and informed while the check is being processed. If it isn't appropriate to let them meet your client group, you might be able to involve them in training courses or other activities. HVC will be happy to assist you with any queries you have regarding volunteers with a DBS check that may have a criminal record attached.

People with Disabilities

Twenty percent of the UK's population are registered as disabled, but only 6% of volunteers have disabilities.

Potential disabled volunteers are often put off volunteering at an early stage by difficulties with access or transport. Wherever possible, organisations should reimburse their volunteers expenses and look into buying any specialist equipment required.

Organisations should always be open to adapting tasks for their volunteers and this might be particularly important when working with disabled individuals. It may be helpful to give a volunteer more breaks, or to look at dividing tasks so that different parts are completed by different people.

The most important thing to take on board is to treat all volunteers as individuals. Don't second guess a volunteers needs talk to them about any support they may need to enable them to volunteer.

DBS – Disclosure and Barring Service

There is no legal requirement to DBS check all your volunteers.

You should base your decision to get a DBS check on either:

- A thorough risk assessment of the role the volunteer will perform and the extent to which this will bring them into contact with children or vulnerable adults.
- If the voluntary work is to be carried out on someone else's premises, for example a school or care home, whether it is a requirement of that organisation for a check to be done, in order to comply with the legislation that governs their business.

If you do need to organise a DBS check, the DBS will provide this free of charge for volunteers. The DBS have licensed a number of 'umbrella bodies' to process checks. If your organisation is not an umbrella body, you will have to approach one to carry out checks on your behalf.

HVC are not currently offering volunteers DBS check however we hope to undertake this task soon, watch this space!

Although the checks themselves are free, almost all umbrella bodies charge an administrative fee; the amount charged varies between organisations.

Keeping disclosures

You can **only** keep the disclosure and/or the information on it for up to **6 months** whilst the application is in process. It must be securely destroyed after no longer required. You can keep the disclosure's ID number as proof that a check was obtained and the date of renewal.

How long do DBS checks last?

There is no official length of time that a DBS check is valid. In a sense they're only valid on the day they're printed. Many organisations choose to re-check after a certain period, often every two or three years. There is a universal checking service which allows volunteers to have one DBS check for multiple agencies – there is a separate additional fee for this service.