

Developing a Volunteering Strategy – Guidance

strat·e·gy /'stratəjē/ - A plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall aim.

Why bother writing a strategy

The potential contribution that volunteers can bring to an organisation, group or service cannot be underestimated. Involving volunteers in what you do can make the difference between achieving and not achieving your overall aims and when involving volunteers it is helpful to consider the engagement of volunteers as an overall aim in itself

Like other strategies that your group has, your volunteering strategy will change and develop over time. However, similar to the values and mission statement of your group, **your strategy should form the foundation** on which on which your volunteering programme grows.

The key to successful volunteer engagement is being clear about why you're doing what you're doing and how you're going to set about achieving it. Consequently, the development of your volunteering programme should be subject to the same strategic thought and planning as you would apply in developing any other aspect of your business and is a **positive addition to your business plan**.

Involving volunteers helps you to meet your aims, but this is just one of the many benefits of involving volunteers. The more understanding and appreciation your group has about the benefits of volunteering, the more your volunteering programme can develop to include and **capture those additional benefits** which has a positive impact on your group and the people that benefit from what you do.

As an objective itself, volunteering can contribute to your outcomes and outputs; bringing people together through inclusion, accessible and supported volunteering, people from different backgrounds, social and economic groups and using this to increase social cohesion and increase your outcomes. Crucially, it brings about **positive outcomes for your volunteers themselves**, in the form of improved health and well-being, confidence and increase opportunities.

Your volunteering strategy will enable you to raise the profile of volunteering in your own organisation and ensuring its place in ongoing strategic conversations. This is critical as volunteering is able to respond to, and needs to develop in relation to the prevailing challenges of our external environment. Aligning your volunteering development with key strategic drivers in your local area is critical in order to maximise the impact of your work, **give yourself the best opportunity to draw down resources** to do so and **open up other opportunities**.

The Brighton and Hove strategy relating to volunteering is the [Power of Volunteering](#) – a **city wide** call to action asking organisations and groups across the sectors to contribute towards a collective vision for volunteering through activity that raises awareness of volunteering, increases numbers, enhances recognition, improves accessibility and promotes good practice in volunteering. Developing your strategy in alignment with this call to action **helps build a stronger and positive future for volunteering in the City**,

Decision makers, funders and commissioners are increasingly recognising the positive contribution that volunteering makes and it is recognised and incorporated in a number of local key strategic documents such as:

[Brighton and Hove Fairness Commission](#)

[Brighton and Hove Social Value Framework](#)

These documents point us towards considering our volunteering development more strategically and, in some instances, **require us to**.

Your volunteering strategy is both your promotional tool and **your opportunity to demonstrate your commitment to volunteering** both to your own volunteers and other organisational stakeholders. It is a tool of influence that can be used to tell funders and others the compelling business case of why you involve volunteers and what you achieve by doing so.

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Developing your volunteering strategy

There is sometimes confusion between and/or blending of strategy and policy. The strategy is the action plan for the organisation and your policies will emerge from the strategy. However, to create a strategy it is important to identify aims/s or reasons as to why a strategy is necessary.



If your organisation is thinking about involving volunteers for the first time or developing new volunteering projects it is critical to consider:

Aim – Reasons for involving volunteers?

1. **WHY** are you involving volunteers in your organisation or group?
2. **What** are your aims for running a volunteer programme
 - Support for your current service
 - Offer opportunities to people who want to volunteer e.g.
 - People wanting to return to work or work experience
 - Change of career
 - People with a disability and/or impairment
 - People who want to be involved in your group due to beliefs/ideals
 - Access for marginalised and excluded communities

Strategy – What questions does your strategy need to address?

1. **WHO** might be affected by involving volunteers?
2. **WHO** needs to be consulted?
3. **WHO** else might help you in achieving the goals for your volunteering programme?
4. **WHAT** roles can be developed to engage volunteers productively, with meaning and value?
5. **HOW** are you going to attract, recruit and select your volunteers?
6. **HOW** are you going to support, supervise, develop and recognise your volunteers?
7. **HOW** do you keep everyone safe?
8. **HOW** to prove and improve?
9. **WHAT** resources do you need to achieve the above?
10. **WHERE** will these actions take place?
11. **WHO** has responsibility to ensure the strategy is being implemented?
12. **WHEN** will you review?

1. Why are you involving volunteers?

Volunteers can bring skills, expertise, time and passion to your cause. They can diversify the thinking, skills and experiences that make up your activity or services and connect your activity to the external world, and vice versa, in a way that is real, meaningful and informative. Service beneficiaries may engage with, respond to and experience volunteer-led service in a way that is different to that delivered by paid staff.

Volunteers can add capacity to an organisation and allow resources to be used in a different way. They may add capacity more flexibly - at certain times, in certain ways and to certain audiences.

Volunteers also have their 'own' experience whilst engaging in their volunteering activities. A positive experience for volunteers is an outcome for your organisation whether primarily connected to your service area or secondary.

What are your outcomes for engaging volunteers?

- increased confidence in volunteers
- greater sense of well-being in service users
- reduced isolation in service users
- greater diversity in the organisation

What are the outputs of your volunteering programme?

- xxx number of volunteers involved in a year period
- xxx number of volunteers trained to do a certain activity

Being able to answer the above is essential in the stages that follow:

- **Clarifying the role** of volunteers in the organisation and what they are contributing;
- **Designing work** for volunteers to do;
- **Generating a better understanding** among paid staff and service users;
- **Identifying** where and how to find people who might want to **volunteer**;
- Measuring your success

2. Who needs to be consulted?

Consultation is the golden thread running through the development of any volunteering strategy.

It is vital that ALL stakeholders are able to contribute towards the development of the strategy, raise queries and concerns, and understand their place within it and essentially sign up to your volunteering agenda.

This may require a different cultural outlook that will not happen overnight but be developed as you go through your journey.

Your stakeholders can be your biggest resource in developing your strategy, using their intelligence and testing your strategy encourages engagement from the outset and lays firm foundations for the future.

Consultation and responding to consultation demonstrates that you are taking others opinions seriously and gives people ownership over direction and actions.

Stakeholders:

- a) Paid Staff
- b) Volunteers
- c) Clients/service users
- d) Board/committee members
- e) Funders
- f) Local Community

a) Paid staff involvement

Do you know what your staff thoughts about the prospect of developing or growing your volunteering programme?

It is important not to make assumptions that staff will support this development. Everyone will come with their own perspective on volunteering – it may be positive, negative or a mixture of both. People may have very fixed views around the type of role a volunteer may carry out or the level of responsibility they might hold. They may also hold stereotypes about who engages in volunteering.

Here are some things you may wish to address with staff:

- What are their anxieties around involving volunteers?
- What benefits do they think volunteers might bring to the organization?
- What risks do they think volunteers bring to the organisation?
- What skills/knowledge do they personally need in order to support a quality volunteering environment – whether directly managing volunteers or not?

It is important that people feel at ease to talk openly and, if appropriate, confidentially around volunteer involvement. Any change can be challenging. Paid staff might feel anxious that their paid role will be lost should volunteers be used. They may also feel undermined or devalued at the notion of a volunteer performing similar tasks. Shifts in relationships and group dynamics, particularly line management, can be unsettling if not understood.

b) Volunteer involvement

Do you know what your volunteers think about the prospect of developing or growing your volunteering programme?

Volunteers may have similar fears or anxieties to paid staff so it is important to include them in the conversation as well. You will be able to ascertain:

- What are their anxieties?
- What are they worried about?

- Changes in group dynamics
- Less support
- Increased or decrease in responsibilities
- What can they tell you about their experience of volunteering with you?
- What would they do differently/improve?

c) Client/service-user involvement

If you are a service-user/client-based organisation it is important to seek the views of the people who benefit from the service. Asking service users how the service can be improved can lead to imaginative and more interesting ideas for volunteering. An example of this is if you have clients whose first language is not English and who would derive additional benefit from having a volunteer with a specific language skill.

d) Your Board or Committee

It is vital that volunteering is understood and supported at the most strategic level of the organisation if it is to be successful. Keeping those at senior, strategic and decision-making level abreast of volunteering developments should form a part of your strategy.

d) Consulting with funders

Discussing the development of volunteering with funders will ensure that you are not in danger of infringing funding agreements. It may generate ideas for new projects and additional funding!

e) Consulting with the local community

Asking the views of people in the community can also lead to ideas for new volunteering opportunities and may even result in encouraging people to offer themselves as volunteers. This applies whether you serve a geographical area or a community of interest.

3. Who else might help you in achieving the goals for your volunteering programme?

It's a strategy – think strategically!

You will not be the first organisation or group who are doing this. How can others help?

- you may be able to read their strategy
- peer support – can you learn from their experiences
- should you be connecting in with local volunteering support services e.g. Volunteer Centre
- Is there a local network for volunteer managers?
- What other organisations exist that complement your work? Can you share volunteers? Can you share training/development costs or anything else?
- Could businesses support you in your volunteering programme? Are they a source of volunteers?
- Is there potential for a consortium?

4. What roles can be developed to engage volunteers productively, with meaning and value?

The range of work for volunteers is or should be pre-determined by the aims and objectives of the organisation one of which may be to provide positive outcomes through the volunteering experience.

The development of volunteering opportunities therefore has to speak to two different agendas - that of the volunteer and that of the organisation – and a balance struck between the two.

Consider the following questions in developing your role structure:

- Do the roles that you are creating bring something additional to the role that paid staff cannot?
- Does the inclusion of volunteers bring something to the organisation that could otherwise not be achieved?
- Are there particular tasks for which the organisation doesn't have the requisite skills which may be obtained through a volunteer placement?
- Can the organisation meet its objectives without those volunteer roles being filled?
- Are there any roles that should ALWAYS be done by paid staff?

Certain strategies can help manage the dynamics of volunteer/paid roles:

- have clear written role descriptions for volunteers
- form a working group that meets regularly to re-visit and review volunteer roles
- offer opportunities for staff and volunteers to learn more about each other's roles
- ensure that the difference between staff and volunteers is well understood across the organisation

Volunteer work and the way it is presented directly determines the sort of people who will be attracted to it, so if you simply ask for volunteers you are likely to get a response from a limited group of people. When you are developing opportunities you should constantly put yourself on a volunteer's place and ask yourself:

- why would I want to do this?
- what will I get out of it?
- what experience/skills/training will I need to do it?
- how will I achieve it?
- how will I know when I've achieved it?

There are many reasons for volunteering, here are just a few:

- to gain skills and experience · to put existing skills to good use
- to gain qualifications/accreditation · to fill time
- to make new friends · to get out of the house
- to work in the community · to improve the community · to be part of the community · to be part of a group · to join in · to meet a challenge
- to work with a particular group of people · to change status from service user to contributor
- to get away from problems · to have fun
- to meet new people · to give purpose to life
- to provide a service · to be of use
- to gain status · to get recognition

In developing new voluntary opportunities it is important to have some understanding of personal motivation so that the work can be satisfying and meet personal expectations. For example, if someone volunteers because they want to make friends, they will not be happy if in a one-to-one situation without contact with other volunteers or staff.

5. How are you going to attract, recruit and select your volunteers?

One in three people volunteer and many more would do so if they were asked. Successful recruitment depends on having the knowledge of the sort of people most likely to do the particular volunteering on offer and the imagination to devise ways of attracting them to your organisation.

a) Who will do it?

Some people are motivated by the opportunity to use existing skills and experience, and others by the chance to work for a specific cause or with a particular client group. The process of designing the role description will have identified skills, experience and qualities necessary for the work and will indicate the sort of people you are looking for. You may want to formalise this by producing a person specification but be wary of including anything that might contravene equal opportunities, including 'essential' criteria only if it is really necessary for the job. In recruiting volunteers you are not only looking for people with specific skills and experience, but also for those with potential to carry out the work with support and training.

b) Where to find volunteers

If the role involves specific skills and experience recruitment will be targeted at places where you will find people with the necessary skills and experience. Widespread and general appeals may raise a lot of interest but will be less efficient than direct targeting. One way to identify where to find potential volunteers is by looking at people doing similar jobs and:

- establishing whether there is a common factor in their backgrounds – employment, education;
- asking how they became volunteers to see if there are similarities in access routes.

If the role is unskilled, if you want people who can be easily trained, or if you need a lot of people for a one-off event, recruitment can be widespread.

c) How you will attract volunteers

Recruitment has a lot in common with marketing – selling the organisation and its opportunities in a way that makes people want to invest their time in them. The most successful campaigns are those that use a variety of ways to appeal to potential volunteers that match some of the different reasons for volunteering.

Recruitment messages that simply say 'volunteers wanted' are rarely successful because they don't contain sufficient information to raise people's interest. There are four things you should try to convey in your message:

- *Statement of need* – why the job is important, what will happen if it isn't done?
- *what the work involves* – describe it in the context of need in a way that people can picture themselves doing it;
- *benefits to the community* – what the work will accomplish, what changes it will make to people's lives;
- *benefits to volunteers* – what volunteers will get in return – skills, experience, new friends.
- *Statement of inclusivity of organisation and volunteering programme and why your organisation believes this*

d) Attracting a diverse volunteer base

Having a diverse volunteer base has many benefits. There include:

- an increase in community cohesion
- an increase in wellbeing of those who volunteer and those who benefit from volunteers, which in turn can have a wider impact on use of citywide services including health and crime reduction.
- an access to a wider range of values and experiences brought by volunteers to beneficiaries and the organisation

Having a diverse and inclusive strategy should:

- include taking the time to identify which groups and individuals are not represented amongst your volunteers and the benefits of reaching out to those people.
- what skills and experiences are missing from your organisational programmes
- be included in the outline of purpose of your volunteering programme to ensure that this is embedded into your programme.
- be added to and publicity and marketing of your volunteer programme.
- consider where you are going to place your publicity where it can reach people who would normally fall outside of your volunteering group.
- consider signing up to any local or national initiatives which are recognisable as demonstrating your commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Having a more diverse volunteer base can be financially beneficial and would do well to feature in your business plan or other planning documents that you have. Including volunteering in the overall plan for the coming years will enable clearer planning and organisation demonstrate that you are able to reach your targets.

Having a monetary figure attached to your volunteering programme will give trustees, management and paid staff a clear picture of the value that volunteers bring and what impact this has on the financial viability of the organisation, project or programme.

e) Are there exclusions or limits?

It is to the benefit of all stakeholders to involve as diverse a volunteer team as possible and the responsibility for encouraging a more inclusive and diverse volunteer base lies with the volunteering organisation. Before considering exclusions or limits consider if there are ways that your volunteering programme can include a particular person or a particular group of people.

- What does the role involve?
- Are there ways to break the role down by task?
- Are there any adjustments that you can make to the role which would allow someone to volunteer with you?
- Are there any adjustments that you can make to the environment which would allow someone to volunteer with you?
- Is there any risk or benefit assessment done prior to including or excluding an individual to volunteer?

Based on this and your organisation's mission statement and values there may still be times where volunteering opportunities are limited. This may affect an organisation that has a focus on a particular age, gender or ethnicity but it is advisable to make the whys and wherefores clear when recruiting volunteers

6. How are you going to support, supervise, develop, recognise and celebrate your volunteers?

Organisations and groups are often, and rightly, concerned about volunteer retention. How you supervise, develop and recognize your volunteers is key in achieving good retention rates.

It is important to remember that a retention rate is good if a volunteer stays as long as you need them to – not necessarily as long as possible! Therefore it's important to consider what things you might need to do for volunteers you want to engage for a one-off event as well as those you want to stay for a year.

Some ideas for support and supervision:

- traditional one-to-one supervision
- peer support with other volunteers
- direct supervision from other volunteers
- mentoring network
- face-to-face, telephone or online?

Some ideas for learning opportunities:

- engagement in traditional training activity from external providers
- in-house staff/volunteer led training
- peer learning groups
- action learning sets
- shadowing in-house or in a partner organisation
- pro-bono skill sharing
- attending sector events and conferences
- webinars

The net outcome of your volunteering strategy should be that your volunteers participate in an environment where they feel continuously valued, rewarded or recognised, and which is not confined to 'Volunteers' Week' alone.

Volunteers report that they feel valued when they are given trusted, responsible and meaningful roles and are able to engage in the organisation in a way that has impact. Engaging volunteers in decision-making is an essential part of this experience as is the way the activity is organized. Consider:

Ownership - a sense of personal responsibility over an event, a client, a product, or geographical area. If a volunteer is involved in only one of many activities in a specific service, there can be no sense of ownership. Design roles that allow volunteers to feel a sense of ownership over them.

Authority to think - give volunteers the opportunity to plan how the work will be done within agreed guidelines. Managers can help set goals but volunteers should be allowed to decide how the goals are achieved.

Responsibility for results - role descriptions usually comprise a list of activities that are to be performed without specifying the end results. Even if the role is fragmented it is possible to set objectives within the work which gives volunteers targets to aim for.

Self evaluation - this helps volunteers know how they are doing and provides the satisfaction of knowing when they have achieved it. If they don't know how they are doing they are likely to get bored. Involve volunteers in setting measurable targets and provide feedback on their performance. As a volunteer organiser you need to answer the questions "What information will tell us if you are succeeding? How can we collect it?"

It is therefore important to have a mix of the following reward/recognition activity in your strategy:

- regular verbal thank you
- meaningful personal feedback
- inclusion in staff events, and team meetings

- consultation on project design/development
- recognition at strategic level e.g. acknowledgements by Trustees and CEO at AGM
- honoraria

7. How will you keep everyone safe?

As an organisation involving volunteers you have a duty of care to provide a safe environment for volunteers and others in the environment. There are also a number of considerations for the organisation here. As follows:

- Insurance - are your volunteers appropriately covered in your insurance cover for the activities they are carrying out? This includes public liability and potentially professional indemnity
- Health & Safety – are you complying with the necessary health & safety procedures? Have you appropriately risk-assessed any activities that volunteers may be carrying out and mitigated against risk where possible?
- Volunteer awareness – what will you put in place to ensure that volunteers behave safely and are kept safe? For example, induction briefings, training and regular updates
- Safeguarding – what structures will you need in place for safeguarding vulnerable volunteers and/or service users? Do you need to DBS check your new volunteers?
- Data Protection – are your volunteers aware of what information is held about them, how it is used, and how they should treat information they encounter in the course of their volunteering?
- Wellbeing – what strategy do you have for a happy volunteering environment? For example, regular volunteer supervision and/or coaching
- Policy – do all of the policies you have that relate to safety reflect your (new) engagement of volunteers? If not, how will you approach this? Who will approach it? What is the time-frame?

8. Proving and Improving

Ensure that monitoring, and evaluation and an approach to demonstrating the impact of your volunteering programme is integrated into design at the outset.

Simple impact tools, such as case studies, can be relatively cheap to gather but someone has to know that they are doing this, plan for it as well as seize opportunities as they arise.

Demonstrating the impact of your volunteering programme could be the most powerful tool you have for leveraging more resources and interest in your work. Consider what external monitoring and evaluation might cost at bid level and budget for it accordingly.

Don't forget that your volunteering impact will be threefold:

1. On society – your service users and beyond
2. On the volunteer themselves
3. On your organisation

Plan for your evaluation to address each area and plan to tell people about the good stories. This might include:

- staff
- volunteers
- service users
- board/committee
- funders
- partners
- local/national press

Your strategy should have plans for examining what you do. It should then have plans for improving or adjusting as the case may be. You may wish to use a quality assurance framework to help you with this e.g. 'Investing in Volunteers'.

9. What resources do you need to achieve the above?

Involving volunteers has resource implications. Involving volunteers may not always save money, or help you deliver a service more cheaply in the long-run. It is important to address costs clearly and realistically. Here are some costs to consider:

- Volunteers will need to be managed. What are your volunteer manager costs?
- Do you have recruitment costs associated with a new volunteer manager post?
- Volunteer managers need a variety of skills e.g. directly in volunteer management, in communication, listening, counselling, negotiation, organisation, administration, report writing, managing meetings and conflict resolution. How much will staff training and development cost?
- Volunteers will need to be trained? What are your training costs?
- Volunteers may need equipment. What are your equipment costs?
- Volunteers should be paid out of pocket expenses. What are they likely to be?
- Volunteers should be included in your insurance. Is there an additional premium?
- Are you going to market your volunteering programme to attract new people? How much might that cost?
- Do you need to translate any information for volunteers? How much is that?
- Celebration, social and other events for volunteers may require a budget. How much?
- Monitoring and evaluating your volunteering programme ensures that you get the most from it. What will it cost to do that?

What is your plan for funding these costs?

- Are these costs included into any funding bid or tender for your project?
- Is your volunteering strategy a part of your business plan?

10. Who has responsibility to ensure this strategy is implemented?

Do you have a named person/s that has responsibility to ensure:

- The strategy is being implemented
- The strategy is on track
- The strategy is achieving it's goals

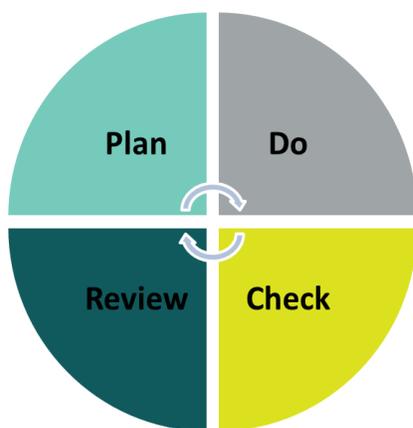
11. Time to review

It is important that within any strategic plan there are markers to check on your progress. This can include:

- Identifying timescales within which you hope to have achieved all or aspects of your strategy
- How you this is going to be achieved.

Options may include:

- Having a start and finish date on the whole of your strategy to indicate when you expect your strategic goals to have been achieved
- Dates by which each part of you strategy needs to be implemented
- Building in review dates to monitor the progress, effectiveness and ongoing relevance of your strategy
- Considering what tools you are going to use to monitor your progress such as the model below:



For more information and support in developing a volunteer strategy or other areas of volunteering development, contact the volunteer centre sue@bhcommunityworks.org.uk