

**'how to' guide: management**

# recruiting volunteers

attracting the people you need

**Fraser Dyer**  
**Ursula Jost**

DIRECTORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

# **Recruiting Volunteers**

**Attracting the people you need**

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FRASER DYER  
AND  
URSULA JOST

DIRECTORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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24 Stephenson Way

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Tel: 020 7209 5151, fax: 020 7391 4804

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Fraser Dyer** has been working in the UK voluntary sector for twenty years, where he previously managed volunteer programmes for Traidcraft and Greenpeace. Since 1991 he has been a management consultant and trainer, and has run hundreds of volunteer management workshops in Britain, Ireland and abroad. For five years he was a partner (with Ursula Jost) in Spiral Associates, and now coaches people on work and management issues. His website is at [www.myworkinglife.com](http://www.myworkinglife.com).

**Ursula Jost** was a founding partner of Spiral Associates, which went on to become the UK's leading firm of training consultants specialising in volunteer management. Previously she was a business development manager and business analyst in the US and Switzerland, and has a master's degree in Industrial Administration. She is currently the Chair of the Swiss Church in London and a trustee of the Volunteer Centre in Kensington and Chelsea, having previously served as Chair. She can be reached at [spiral@intonet.co.uk](mailto:spiral@intonet.co.uk).

# INTRODUCTION

Britain has a tremendous tradition of volunteering. People from all walks of life give their time freely to help others in need, to campaign for a cause, to improve their community, or to offer mutual support to others who have the same passions or problems as themselves. Almost half the adult population in the UK does some form of voluntary activity, and in turn they take a part in the nation's second biggest leisure activity.

Volunteering is more than just a hobby, though. The work that volunteers do is essential to the functioning of our society. Volunteers deliver a significant proportion of community services – in schools, hospitals, family homes, community centres, forests, parks, museums, playing fields, theatres, animal sanctuaries and many other settings. We've come to rely heavily on them to sustain our social care provision, heritage, environment and the arts.

The work of volunteers extends beyond maintaining the status quo. They lobby for change, campaign against injustice, and speak up on behalf of the marginalised, oppressed and abused. They feed the hungry, visit the sick and imprisoned, comfort the bereaved, and befriend the lonely.

They also have fun. Whether running children's clubs, coaching sports activities, conserving the countryside or raising money by bathing in baked beans, the sound of laughter is never far from a group of volunteers.

If volunteers are important to us, the opportunity to volunteer is equally important to them. Many can testify to the way that voluntary work has given them more than just a jolly good time – lasting friendships, personal development, new skills, a route through depression or bereavement, a foothold on the jobs ladder, a means of giving something back to society, a sense of purpose, the satisfaction of having achieved a goal, and much, much more.

In the last twenty years we've seen some important changes to the way volunteers are utilised within the community. The range of roles that volunteers undertake seems to grow ever more diverse. Increasingly, volunteering has become recognised as relevant work experience, helping young people to get jobs and older people to change career paths. And the methods that organisations use to manage volunteers have become more organised, structured and professional.

What doesn't seem to have changed so much are the ways in which volunteers are recruited. Finding an adequate supply of people to run their services or assist their staff continues to be a struggle for many organisations. While demand for

volunteers has grown, the strategies for finding them have stagnated. Recruitment ads are looking tired, generic and unimaginative.

This is not entirely the fault of volunteer recruiters. Many of those who are responsible for finding and managing volunteers are expected to perform too many other tasks and activities. Management committees, trustees and senior management need to wake up to the fact that volunteer involvement doesn't happen by magic. If the volunteer programme is going to run efficiently (and safely), then adequate time and resources need to be allocated to run it. This is unlikely to happen when responsibility for volunteers is tacked onto the end of another job.

Finding enough time to commit to recruitment is likely to be one of the biggest hurdles you face. Sadly, you will not find any short cuts within these pages. There are no instant solutions, or easy answers, for the key to successful recruitment lies in thorough strategic planning and regular ongoing activity. No matter how helpful or interesting you find this book, if you can't allocate sufficient time to recruitment you are unlikely to overcome the many challenges that finding volunteers presents.

We believe that success in recruiting volunteers is measured by finding *enough* of the *right* people for your organisation. In other words, you will not only recruit enough people, but they will also have the skills, commitment and qualities that are necessary to fulfil their role effectively. We have therefore written at length about being clear on who you want to recruit, and on strategies for successfully seeking out and attracting them to your organisation. We have not discussed selection and screening methods, or other issues related to volunteer management after the point of application.

One of the difficulties we've faced in writing about volunteers has been the diversity of organisations that involves them. We've tried to avoid making assumptions about the kind of organisation you belong to. You may, or may not, have employees. Perhaps you have clients or service-users, but maybe you don't. You could be politically or religiously motivated, or neither of those. You might be a small community project, or a large multi-million pound charity. Given all the variations in the volunteering world, it is inevitable that some of the examples or situations we describe, or terms we use, will be unfamiliar to you. While we've aimed to talk in general terms, we also wanted to give specific examples. You might find you need to translate some of the ideas and principles we share to make them appropriate to your organisation. For example, we regularly use the title 'volunteer coordinator' to describe the person who organises volunteer involvement and recruitment in your organisation. We realise that many projects won't have an employee with that job title but hope that you can equate that function with however you undertake it in your setting.

Over the years we have run workshops on volunteer recruitment for hundreds of people. We thought we knew something about the topic when we started out, but it was nothing compared to how much we learned from the experiences and insights of our course participants. A great many of the lessons in this book were learned from them and we'd like to say a big 'thank you' to them.

We are also grateful for the help, support and advice given to us during the writing of this book by the following people: John Bailey, Alison Baxter, Kate Bowgett, Rosemary Brown, Philip Carraro, Paul Chaplin, Eildon Dyer, Elizabeth Dyer, Anne Green, Nan Hawthorne, Elizabeth Heren, Rob Jackson, Gareth Jenkins, Nick King and Gerry Leighton, Shaun Levin, Bridget Morris, Mark Restall, John Stormont, Jamie Thomas, Margaret Thomas, Meena Varma and Stephanie Willats.

Fraser Dyer and Ursula Jost  
April 2002





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# PLANNING YOUR VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

## Why plan?

Have you ever set off on a trip without knowing where you are going? You just took off – perhaps with a friend, or the family – and followed your nose, without any idea of what your destination would be? For an afternoon out, or a day trip, it can be quite exciting to see where you end up.

But what about a holiday abroad? Would you do it then? Most people usually prefer to go on a planned holiday. They want to know beforehand where they are going, how they will reach their destination, and what they can expect in terms of climate, culture and comfort when they get there. Indeed many people don't even want to organise the trip themselves, and prefer to use a travel agent to arrange much of it.

Recruiting volunteers is similar to organising people to go on a journey. Before you set out you will need to do some planning and organising. Like travellers, most potential volunteers want to know what lies in store – the type of work they will be expected to do, at what times, the location, and whether any particular skills or qualities are required. It will also help if they know what people they will be working with, as well as how they will be prepared and supported in their work.

Some holidaymakers want to adapt their travel arrangements to suit their individual needs and interests. How flexible can you be in adapting to the individual needs and interests of your potential volunteers? Does everyone have to be a clone in the same tightly defined roles, or are you prepared to make volunteering with you attractive to a wide range of people by tailoring voluntary work to each person's requirements?

It is not only your new volunteers who want to know what lies ahead. Your existing volunteers, staff, trustees and others will want to know what implications arise for them as a result of your recruitment activity. By taking time to organise and plan your recruitment, you will help to prepare them for your new arrivals. Relevant service-users, staff, supporters or members may want to be consulted

about the creation of new volunteering roles. In addition, staff need to be trained in how to manage and support volunteers effectively, and your trustees need to approve your volunteer policies.

Most importantly, perhaps, a well thought out plan will help you to be more effective and efficient in your recruitment efforts. In other words, planning leads to success.

## The planning process

You need to be clear about the type of journey you are inviting volunteers to embark on, and have clear goals which define why you want to involve them, where, and at what cost. Your plan should also outline the best way to achieve these goals and whom you will need to involve. A plan of this sort will save you time, money and energy, and help to gain the goodwill and support of your colleagues.

As you may be beginning to realise, your plan for volunteer involvement needs to cover more than just how you are going to find people. The pieces need to be in place for the rest of your volunteer programme too. The chart opposite provides an overview of the areas that you will want to organise or review before beginning to recruit new volunteers.

In our work with voluntary organisations we've seen so many problems that were caused by a lack of planning:

- volunteers arriving for work and finding nothing to do because no one has defined their roles;
- resentment of volunteers among existing staff who have not been consulted, informed or trained about volunteer involvement;
- volunteers who get upset because their roles are suddenly changed;
- established volunteers who, out of suspicion or fear, fail to be welcoming towards newcomers;
- volunteers leaving because the work wasn't what they expected, or because it was badly organised;
- complaints from clients about the service from volunteers because no one has explained what a volunteer is (and isn't) permitted to do.

When volunteer coordinators struggle to recruit enough volunteers, or find themselves with a problematic volunteer programme on their hands, it is virtually always the result of poor planning. It may feel (and it is) very time consuming to put together a proper plan for the programme, but the mess resulting from a failure to plan can take much longer to sort out.

## **Recruiting new volunteers – planning overview**

### **Planning and organising**

- Establish goals and budget for overall volunteer programme
- Define roles for volunteers
- Develop volunteer policies
- Set up insurance and expenses payments for volunteers
- Prepare staff, clients and existing volunteers for new volunteers.

### **Recruitment**

- Clarify recruitment goals and budget
- Identify appropriate recruitment methods and strategies.

### **Selecting volunteers**

- Specify criteria for each voluntary role
- Choose appropriate selection methods
- Agree who is involved in selection process.

### **Inducting and training volunteers**

- Design induction programme
- Conduct training needs analysis.

### **Supervising and supporting volunteers**

- Agree how volunteers will be supported in their work
- Decide who needs to be involved in support and supervision.

## **An overall volunteer strategy**

You can't plan recruitment without a strategy for the whole volunteer programme. When you go shopping for clothes you don't buy a shirt or a blouse simply because you like it. Even when you buy something on impulse, your mind considers a range of factors, such as can you afford it? Does it fit you? Will it match other clothes you already have? Is it suitable for work?

Before going out to find new volunteers you need to be sure that their involvement makes sense within the wider framework of your organisation, and your volunteer programme. Is your recruitment plan congruent with the overall strategy for the volunteer programme? How will new volunteers help your organisation fulfil its mission and purpose? What resources – including a budget – do you have at your disposal? Where do you most urgently need the help of volunteers, and where do you need their long-term support?

In a charity we shall call 'Blue,' there was no plan at all for the volunteer programme and no organised recruitment. As Blue had a high media profile, and worked in a field that had much popular support, they were fairly well off. A number of Blue's donors offered to come in and help out at the office to support the work of the staff team. Staff tended to call upon volunteers when they were stressed and had a mountain of paperwork stacking up on their desks, but they didn't take time to define the work that volunteers would do or to calculate the time it would take. Staff would often promise volunteers verbally that they would have an interesting and responsible workload, but it frequently amounted to little more than filing and photocopying. When volunteers had cleared the backlog, there would be no ongoing work for them, often because staff were not prepared to relinquish the more interesting tasks. Sometimes, volunteers would turn up and find no one would give them any work at all, even though staff were rushed off their feet. This resulted in a downward spiral. Volunteer attendance became sporadic and staff complained about how unreliable volunteers were. Many volunteers left after only a few weeks, feeling annoyed at the cavalier way their contribution had been treated. Staff were fed up at having to re-start the process of bringing in new volunteers, getting to know them and explaining what had to be done. Over time staff made even less effort to induct new volunteers. 'Why bother?' they would say. 'They are only going to leave in a few weeks.'

Putting together a strategy for the overall volunteer programme might sound daunting but it doesn't need to be. It can begin by simply taking a look at the current involvement of volunteers. What works, and what is proving less successful? Where can you make improvements and how will you introduce the changes? Think about the future and ask yourself if there are any new areas where volunteers could be involved, or whether there are some existing areas where fewer volunteers are needed. Based on this work you can then set some objectives for yourself for the next year or two, and work out an action plan that breaks these objectives down into prioritised activities.

It is well worth taking time to build commitment to your plan from those within the organisation. By presenting your strategy to your manager, trustees and colleagues (including existing volunteers, if appropriate) you will have the opportunity to talk with them about the bigger picture. Getting their 'buy-in' for your plan is more likely to lead to their cooperation and support when it comes to implementing it.

## USEFUL ADDRESSES

### **National Volunteering Agencies**

These national organisations can give you information and advice on volunteering issues. They do not directly place volunteers but some can point you to appropriate local or national brokers of volunteering opportunities.

#### **National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service**

Arundel Court, 177 Arundel Street, Sheffield S1 2NU  
Tel: 0114 278 6636, website: [www.nacvs.org.uk](http://www.nacvs.org.uk)

Can give you details of your local CVS, which acts as a coordinating body for local voluntary action.

#### **National Centre for Volunteering**

Now called Volunteering England. See separate listing.

#### **National Coalition for Black Volunteering**

Capital House, 20–22 Craven Road, London W2 3PX  
Tel: 020 706 4549 fax: 020 7706 4771

Provides information on making volunteering opportunities accessible to black people within all volunteer-involving organisations in the UK.

#### **Northern Ireland Volunteer Development Agency**

4<sup>th</sup> Floor, 58 Howard Street, Belfast BT1 6TG  
Tel: 028 9023 6100, e-mail: [info@volunteering-ni.org](mailto:info@volunteering-ni.org)  
website: [www.volunteering-ni.org](http://www.volunteering-ni.org)

National resource agency for Northern Ireland on volunteering.

Provides information on volunteering.

#### **Student Volunteering England**

Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London E2 6HG  
Tel: 0800 018 2146, e-mail: [info@studentvolunteering.org.uk](mailto:info@studentvolunteering.org.uk)  
website: [www.studentvolunteering.org.uk](http://www.studentvolunteering.org.uk)

Exists to support, promote and develop student volunteering groups through information, training and group development programmes.

They provide contact information for local student volunteering groups. Some student volunteering groups promote local volunteering opportunities, some work in partnership with local volunteer-involving organisations and some develop their own volunteering projects.

## **Volunteer Development Scotland**

Stirling Enterprise Park, Stirling, FK7 7RP

Tel: 0178 647 9593, e-mail: [information@vds.org.uk](mailto:information@vds.org.uk)

website: [www.vds.org.uk](http://www.vds.org.uk)

Development agency for volunteering in Scotland.

Provides information service and has comprehensive website.

## **Volunteering England**

Regent's Wharf, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9RL

New Oxford House, 16 Waterloo Street, Birmingham B2 5UG

Tel: 0845 305 6979, e-mail: [information@volunteeringengland.org](mailto:information@volunteeringengland.org)

website: [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)

National resource agency for England on volunteering.

Information Line at free phone number 0800 028 3304 or e-mail: [information@thecentre.org.uk](mailto:information@thecentre.org.uk)

Website contains useful information, list of publications, a volunteering image bank and links to National Volunteers Managers Forum (NVMF) and to the Institute for Volunteering Research, as well as special websites such as Employee Volunteering ([www.employeevolunteering.org.uk](http://www.employeevolunteering.org.uk)), Diversity ([www.diversitychallenge.org](http://www.diversitychallenge.org)) and Volunteers' Week ([www.volunteersweek.org.uk](http://www.volunteersweek.org.uk)).

## **Wales Council for Voluntary Action**

Baltic House, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff CF10 5FH

Tel: 0870 607 1666, e-mail: [help@wcva.org.uk](mailto:help@wcva.org.uk)

website: [www.wcva.org.uk](http://www.wcva.org.uk)

Campaigns for and represents voluntary organisations and communities in Wales.

## Youth Action Network

Crest House, 7 Highfield Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 3ED  
 Tel: 0121 455 9732, e-mail: [info@youth-action.org.uk](mailto:info@youth-action.org.uk)  
 website: [www.youth-action.org.uk](http://www.youth-action.org.uk)

National organisation bringing together specialist local volunteer organisations. Website contains extensive contact list of national youth agencies, voluntary youth organisations and local youth action.

## Umbrella organisations

### Commission for Racial Equality

St Dunstan's House, 201–211 Borough High Street, London SE1 1GZ  
 Tel: 020 939 0000, e-mail: [info@cre.gov.uk](mailto:info@cre.gov.uk)  
 website: [www.cre.gov.uk](http://www.cre.gov.uk)

Promotes equal opportunities for all regardless of race, colour or ethnic origin.

### Confederation of Indian Organisations (CIO)

5 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7XW  
 Tel: 020 7928 9889, e-mail: [headoffice@cio.org.uk](mailto:headoffice@cio.org.uk)  
 website: [www.cio.org.uk](http://www.cio.org.uk)

Provides support, advice and information to South Asian community organisations.

### National Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations (CEMVO)

Boardman House, 64 Broadway, Stratford, London E15 1NG  
 Tel: 020 8432 0307/0308, e-mail: [enquiries@emf-cemvo.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@emf-cemvo.co.uk)  
 website: [emf-cemvo.co.uk](http://emf-cemvo.co.uk)

A national organisation that supports ethnic minority voluntary organisations.



## recruiting volunteers

### attracting the people you need

Volunteers are the life-blood of many voluntary organisations, yet finding the right people who are prepared to commit themselves can be a real challenge. You have to seek them out, encourage them and offer roles that are satisfying. This guide is designed to help anyone who seeks volunteers for their organisation. It prompts you to think of volunteer recruitment in the context of a wider volunteer strategy.

Drawing on their extensive experience of working and training in this area, the authors emphasise the importance of a regular recruitment programme. Their practical advice and imaginative ideas will help you take a fresh approach to:

- planning your recruitment
- finding people with the right skills
- using your networks
- producing effective recruitment messages
- making your organisation attractive to volunteers
- bringing diversity into your volunteer workforce.

