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# DIVERSITY IN VOLUNTEERING



In Partnership with

Northern Bank

## Volunteering is:

The commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community, the environment or individuals outside ones immediate family. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain.

The principles of volunteering further define it as:

- A vibrant expression of active citizenship and community involvement.
- Driven by its outcomes and impacts.
- A means of adding value to the work of an organisation or group.
- Never a substitute for paid employment.
- Based in grass roots community participation yet incorporates the business community and government.
- A unifying theme which creates cross sectoral partnerships.
- A tool for the promotion of inclusion and part of the wider equality agenda.
- A dynamic force for change which has positive effects on the volunteer individuals, organisations and communities.
- A tool for empowering people and communities to fulfill their potential and contribute to social change.

## INTRODUCTION

This publication was not born from a single vision but is the combination of many ideas from people from different backgrounds and viewpoints.

Diversity in volunteering means diversity in terms of the people involved and diversity in the opportunities available. Volunteering should be an inclusive process in which people from diverse backgrounds and with diverse skills can participate, regardless of race, gender, religion, disability, sexual orientation etc.

The aim of this booklet is to encourage organisations to reflect on diversity in volunteering, on the barriers to diversity in volunteering and what it means to be a diverse organisation. The guidance can be embraced by organisations of all shapes and sizes.

## **Common Questions and Concerns about Diversity in Volunteering**

Below are some common questions and concerns about diversity and volunteering. The answers are designed to quickly allay any fears or reservations you might have. As you read through them pick the one, or combination, most relevant to your organisation and go to the section indicated. Alternatively you might decide to start at section one and work your way through. The choice is yours!

What exactly is meant by diversity in volunteering?

**Go to section 1**

What is a diverse organisation?

**Go to section 2**

We would love to be more diverse but there isn't much variety in our area. All the people are alike and our volunteers reflect this. It will be difficult for us to meet targets and encourage different types of people – because there are none!

**Go to section 3**

We have an equal opportunities policy. Do we need to do more?

**Go to section 4**

Our volunteers just get on with their work, we don't have any policies relating to volunteers, never mind a diversity strategy!

**Go to section 5**

Our volunteers are fine as they are. I don't want to go upsetting the apple cart and risk losing volunteers. What's in it for our organisation?

**Go to section 6**

Talking about diversity is all very well but what can we actually do about it?

**Go to section 7**

We have very limited resources. There is no way we can afford ramps or material printed in different languages. Is there anything we can do?

**Go to section 8**

Are there other organisations that can help us?

**Go to section 9**

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## What is diversity in volunteering?

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Diversity in volunteering means two things:

- A varied body of volunteers, and
- A varied selection of roles that volunteers can carry out.

These two aspects of diversity in volunteering are inter-linked. Different kinds of people are attracted to different activities and so it follows that if you offer a diverse range of volunteering roles they should attract a diverse range of volunteers.

"Diversity not only assumes that all individuals are unique i.e. different, but that difference is indeed value-added."

Santiago Rodriguez, Diversity and volunteerism, Journal of Volunteer Administration, Spring 1997

"Volunteers are more likely to be female, married and in full time work."

Volunteering in Northern Ireland,  
Volunteer Development Agency, 2001

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## What is a diverse organisation?

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A diverse organisation is one which:

- Views individuals as unique.
- Is welcoming to everyone.
- Recognises that people with different experiences and outlooks on life bring fresh ideas and new perceptions.
- Listens to its stakeholders and adopts policies and practices which harness the energies of its diverse body of volunteers.
- Views diversity as a positive attribute which helps make the organisation's work more relevant and accessible to all kinds of people as well as valuing diversity as an end in itself.

- Is innovative and creative.
- Involves volunteers at all levels, carrying out all kinds of roles.

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### What is the range of people we are talking about?

When we talk about an organisation, which is diverse, we mean one that represents the community that it is in. It is not about setting targets or trying to be all things to all people. You must be realistic about what can be achieved but at the same time think creatively about what diversity means. Think about diversity in terms of making everyone feel welcome, in particular consider how your volunteer team could have a mix in terms of:

- age
- socio-economic class
- employment status
- religion (remember that there are more than two religions in Northern Ireland)
- educational attainment
- ethnicity
- gender
- sexual orientation
- political opinion
- whether a volunteer has dependents
- marital status
- disability (keep in mind that some disabilities are hidden).

Also keep in mind that everyone is a combination of several of the categories above.

## **Case Study - Diversity of People**

A local community development association, in a Protestant area of Belfast, was working on a strategic plan for the next five years. When it came to examining how representative their volunteers were, the group restated their commitment to equal opportunities, but emphasized that their mission was to serve their local community, which was 100% Protestant. The group had good links with the community association in the nearby Catholic estate, but it was unrealistic to expect them to recruit Catholics as volunteers.

The consultant working with them on the strategic plan pointed out that being diverse and representative is not just about religion. To be truly representative and diverse the group should look at the different kinds of people within their own community.

Once they started to think about it was hard to stop. For example, they pointed out that there were people with disabilities in their community, yet they had no disabled volunteers. They discovered that although there were a lot of lone parents in the area, none of them were volunteers. The group decided to target these two under represented groups but realised that they did not have the expertise to discover why these people were not coming forward as volunteers.

They decided to ask a few people with disabilities and lone parents in the area what would encourage them to get involved. One lone parent pointed out that she was bored sitting at home and would love to get out and about. However, she could not afford childcare. The group did not yet have the resources to reimburse this expense, but they pointed out they ran a crèche in the mornings for local parents to try and raise some funds. They decided that the children of volunteers could attend the crèche free of charge while their parents are volunteering.

A disabled person in the area said he was interested in getting involved in the management of the group. However he said that he would have trouble getting into the groups offices to attend meetings and this put him off volunteering. The group admitted that the premises were not ideal. They were currently looking for funding to help improve access but in the immediate future they decided to hold committee meetings on the ground floor, rather than in the meeting room upstairs, where they had been meeting for the last ten years.

#### 4 **Is diversity the same as equal opportunities?**

An equal opportunities policy is one important part of encouraging and managing diversity in your organisation. In many cases equal opportunities is about ‘righting a wrong’. It recognises that certain groups have been discriminated against or disadvantaged and aims to redress the imbalance. This is essential and extremely valuable.

Diversity is more strategic. It is about making sure that everyone is welcome and facilitated, not just the groups of people that you can identify as under-represented or that are identified in legislation. Equal opportunities usually focuses on specific groups of people e.g. targeting recruitment at women, while diversity is about facilitating each individual to become involved, what ever their needs. The difference lies in the motivation and focus of the two.

#### 5 **How can we get started?**

Different organisations are at various levels of development with regard to volunteering. If you currently

do not have a volunteer policy or have never thought out procedures for effectively managing your volunteers, this is an obvious starting point. Research has shown that if volunteers are managed well, they are more likely to stay and enjoy their volunteering. Effectively managing your volunteers' means developing appropriate policies and procedures, e.g. a recruitment policy or procedures for support and supervision. You can build diversity into your policies and procedures. If you are doing this for the first time then you can ensure that diversity is a key factor of your volunteer strategy. The Volunteer Development Agency provides information and advice to assist organisations develop policies and procedures for the effective management of volunteers. For contact details see the Where can we go for help? section at the end of this document. If you already have policies and procedures for managing volunteers then they can be reviewed in light of what you learn from thinking about diversity.

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### **Why should organisations encourage diversity among their volunteers?**

By encouraging diversity in volunteering your organisation will:

- Benefit from new ideas and fresh approaches generated by people from different backgrounds and experiences.
- Help ensure that your work is relevant to and impacts on all kinds of people in society.
- Present a more welcoming face to volunteers, client groups and the general public.
- Help promote the inclusion of groups who may feel they are on the margins of society in Northern Ireland.
- Have more volunteers.

- Be better equipped to respond to the needs of your community or service users.
- Attract new clients or service users.

In an article in the personnel magazine *Human Resources*, Geraldine Brown explains, "Since being with your own kind makes you feel safe, while being with those who are different makes you feel uncomfortable, there is a natural tendency in organisations for managers to recruit clones. This is hardly good for business; if everyone thinks the same, you won't get new ideas. Similarly, recruiting people because their face fits is hardly the best way of finding new talent."

### **Case Study - Diversity of Roles**

A charity shop in Dungannon had a reliable group of five female volunteers. All the women were around the same age and had become firm friends over the years. The local volunteer bureau contacted the Volunteer Organiser of the charity and told them they had been contacted by a young fashion and design student who was interested in volunteering in a charity shop. The student had indicated that he had a keen eye for design and wanted to practise his talents and contribute to a worthwhile cause at the same time. The Volunteer Organiser at first thought that a young male would not really be the ideal person to volunteer in their shop. She was conscious that all the current volunteers were very happy with arrangements and the organisation did not want to risk losing a good team of volunteers. However the Volunteer Organiser agreed to speak to the volunteers and assess the situation. The shop volunteers did seem a little reluctant to change at first so the Volunteer Organiser asked if there were any particular roles they could think of which would utilise the students' skills.

They suggested that the shop windows could be a little more exciting. It was agreed that the new volunteer should be given the role of looking after and creating visual displays, leaving the other volunteers to get on with their usual roles of pricing goods and dealing with customers. When the new volunteer began his role his energy and enthusiasm rejuvenated the group of volunteers. As a result of the new window displays, the sales in the shop rose by £200 in the first week. The Volunteer Organiser admitted that introducing a new type of volunteer and finding an appropriate role did require more effort on her part, but it was well worth it!

## 7 | What will encouraging diversity involve?

Starting to consider diversity in volunteering in your organisation will mean you will have to take action in three areas:



### **Reflection and Research**

This is about examining how your organisation currently stands with regard to diversity.



### **Policy and Practice**

This is about what you do and how you do it – the practical arrangements of how you operate



### **Image and Information**

This is about the image you project and how you communicate information about your organisation to your volunteers, staff members, clients, user groups and the general public.

## 8 | Action Points

Below there is a list of a number of practical things that you can do to begin looking at diversity in volunteering.

All of these things will have an impact on the diversity of the volunteers you attract and the roles they play. Some of these things may not be relevant to every organisation so you will need to decide which things you do first.



■ Survey a number of key people in your organisation, in particular volunteers and find out how they think you are doing with regard to diversity, do they think your organisation is representative of wider society? What kinds of people are currently under represented in your organisation? Are you doing anything, which they feel, is discriminatory or makes it difficult for different kinds of people to volunteer with you? What can you change or do better?



■ Audit your volunteers, including your management committee. Find out what kind of people volunteer with you already and identify what groups of people are missing. Ask your volunteers if there is anything you could do to assist them in their volunteering e.g. written information in large print or on audiotape.



■ Draw up an equal opportunities policy as part of your organisation's overall volunteer policy.



■ Examine your recruitment policy. Do you always advertise in the same places or rely on existing volunteers to recruit new people by telling people they know?

### **Case Study - Diversity in Communications**

A large children's charity was finding it increasingly difficult to recruit new volunteers. When reviewing their recruitment processes, the Volunteer Manager looked closely at how they advertised volunteer vacancies. The organisation was registered with the local volunteer bureau, it advertised in the local library, doctor's surgery

and sometimes in local newspapers. While the organisation felt this was fairly comprehensive, it was obvious that there was a large section of the public they were not reaching.

The Volunteer Manager decided to try putting posters in a series of new places. She began to advertise in the local drop-in centre for people with disabilities and the offices of a group set up to support gay men. She contacted the local umbrella group for people from minority ethnic communities and advertised in the newsletter of the local rural network. When the time came for the organisation's bi-annual recruitment road show they set up information stalls in local centres, clubs for people with disabilities and attended a session of the local support group for lone parents. The dates and times of other road shows were advertised in the gay press as well as in the usual places. The Volunteer Manager found that the number of people interested in volunteering increased.



■ Review the practical arrangements you make with your volunteers. For example:

- When arranging meetings or activities consider the time and venue, disability access, child friendly arrangements, is the food suitable?
- Do you reimburse volunteer's out of pocket expenses?
- Are you flexible about how much time volunteers are required to give, can you tailor this to suit each volunteer?
- Do you create an open and inclusive atmosphere in your organisation or are you prone to 'cliques', which might make it hard for new people to join in?



■ Ensure that all staff members and volunteers are aware of your organisation's equal opportunities policy and receive training on its implementation



■ Look at the kinds of roles volunteers carry out in your organisation. Is there any new role you could create that could attract new volunteers? Try to find something different, which will attract different types of volunteers.



■ Think about how you will meet the needs of new volunteers. For example if you provide written information and a volunteer requires this on audiotape how will you facilitate this? Getting the mechanisms in place will mean that you will have a clear idea about what is possible and how to react when a request is made. Make sure that all members of staff know what is available and are aware of the correct procedures.



■ Audiotape is a particularly good way of communicating information. It makes it immediately accessible for people who have visual impairments and since the spoken word is often easier to understand than written, tapes are also useful for people who do not use English as their first language. You could contact the Blind Centre for Northern Ireland for more information on how to develop information on audiotape.



■ Convene a diversity working group to look at your current policy and practice. Draw up a strategy for increasing diversity in your organisation and oversee the implementation of the strategy.

## Diversity in Action

Joined in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence (JEDI) is an initiative which brings together the various parts of the Northern Ireland youth sector, in a partnership to promote change and development.

**Equity** – a commitment to fairness including the redressing of any identified undesirable or inequitable balance.

**Diversity** – encouraging respect for and expression of the range of identities represented by young people in Northern Ireland and those who work with them in the youth sector.

**Interdependence** – recognizing and exploring ways in which our individual paths are intertwined. Building relationships and trust.

The joint aims of the initiative are;

- To imbue the inter-related principles of equity, diversity and interdependence into the ethos, policies and programmes of the organisations which make up the youth sector.
- To develop a coherent strategy for community relations, youth work and education for citizenship within the Northern Ireland youth sector.

For further information visit the JEDI web site at [www.jedini.com](http://www.jedini.com)



- Look at the make up of your management committee or governing body and consider increasing the diversity.



- Be aware of diversity when developing written materials. Be careful of the language you use and the images you present.



- Offer your written information and publicity material in a variety of formats eg a large print version or audio tape.



- Think clearly and carefully about the impact that your diversity strategy will have on your existing volunteers. People are apprehensive about change and volunteers may feel threatened or in some way undermined. Aim to involve existing volunteers in the development of the strategy and provide them with full information on its implementation and how it will effect them. Consider what action you will take if volunteers resist the implementation of the strategy.



- Monitor why volunteers leave your organisation. Is it for personal reasons? Do they have needs which are not being met? Does your organisation have a policy or

practice, which makes it difficult for them to continue to volunteer with you?

This list of action points is by no means exhaustive and not all of the actions will be relevant to your organisation. It is up to you to work out what is appropriate for you and act accordingly.

## 9 **Where can we get help?**

Some of the organisations listed below have been involved in this publication. You can contact them for advice. However this list is not exhaustive and there are many more organisations who have expertise in the areas of diversity and inclusion.

### **For information on all areas of involving volunteers contact:**

VolunteerNow  
129 Ormeau Road, Belfast, BT7 1SH  
Tel 028 9023 2020  
Email [info@volunteernow.co.uk](mailto:info@volunteernow.co.uk)  
Web [www.volunteernow.co.uk](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk)

### **For information on involving people from black and minority ethnic communities contact:**

Multi-Cultural Resource Centre  
12 Upper Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NT  
Tel 028 9024 4639  
Email [mrc@mrc.co.uk](mailto:mrc@mrc.co.uk)  
Web [www.mrc.co.uk](http://www.mrc.co.uk)

**For information on involving young people and the voluntary youth sector contact:**

YouthNet  
The Warehouse  
7 James Street South, Belfast BT2 8DN  
Tel 028 9033 1880  
Email [youthnet-ni@dnet.co.uk](mailto:youthnet-ni@dnet.co.uk)  
Web [www.youthnetni.org.uk](http://www.youthnetni.org.uk)

**For information on disability issues contact:**

Disability Action NI  
Portside Business Park,  
189 Airport Road West, Belfast BT3 9ED  
Tel 028 9049 1011  
Email [hq@disabilityaction.org](mailto:hq@disabilityaction.org)  
Web [www.disabilityaction.org](http://www.disabilityaction.org)

**For information on older people and volunteering contact:**

Age NI  
3 Lower Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NR  
Tel 028 9024 5729  
Email [info@ageni.org](mailto:info@ageni.org)  
Web [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

**For information on sexual orientation contact:**

Coalition on Sexual Orientation (COSO)  
Third Floor, 33 Church Lane, Belfast  
Tel 028 9031 9030  
Email [admin@coso.org.uk](mailto:admin@coso.org.uk)  
Web [www.coso.org.uk](http://www.coso.org.uk)

### **Useful publications:**

Volunteer Now has produced a comprehensive set of five workbooks outlining best practice for the involvement of volunteers. Entitled *As Good As They Give*, the books are aimed at the individual or team responsible for managing volunteers. The books can be used as a learning resource or as a basis for group training sessions. To view these publications and many others visit [www.volunteernow.co.uk](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk).

The Royal National Institute for the Blind has produced excellent guidelines to help organisations produce written material in accessible formats. To order a copy of *See It Right* contact:

**RNIB**

224 Great Portland Street, London W1W 5AA

Tel 020 7388 1266 or

Web [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

Information is also available from the Blind Centre for Northern Ireland, contact:

**Blind Centre for Northern Ireland**

70 North Road, Belfast BT5 5NJ

Tel 028 90654366

Email [info@bcni.co.uk](mailto:info@bcni.co.uk)

Web [www.bcni.co.uk](http://www.bcni.co.uk)

Skill - The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities have produced two documents which are useful in helping organisations to create volunteering opportunities for people with disabilities. To order a copy of Disability Equality in Volunteering and/or Into Volunteering – positive experiences of disabled people contact Skill:

Chapter House

18-20 Crucifix Lane, LONDON SE1 3JW

Voice/text: 020 7450 0620

Web [www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk)

The Coalition on Sexual Orientation (COSO) has produced a booklet called Equality and Sexual Orientation: a guide to involving and consulting lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans communities. For a copy contact :

COSO

Third Floor,33 Church Lane,BELFAST

Tel 028 90319030

Email [admin@coso.org.uk](mailto:admin@coso.org.uk)

Web [www.coso.org.uk](http://www.coso.org.uk)

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# D I V E



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

129 Ormeau Road

Belfast BT7 1SH

Tel: 028 9023 2020

Fax: 028 9023 7570

Email: [info@volunteernow.co.uk](mailto:info@volunteernow.co.uk)

Web: [www.volunteernow.co.uk](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk)