

RESOURCE GUIDE 3

QUALITY AREA 3: VOLUNTEER INCLUSION

There is a positive approach to inclusion, equity and diversity and a proactive approach to making volunteering accessible.

This Resource Guide will explore good practice in relation to making sure that volunteering is accessible to all. It will explore the following standards:

- 3.1 The organisation is inclusive and managed in a way that encourages the involvement of and is welcoming to a wide range of people**
 - 3.1.1 Creating a culture of inclusion, diversity and equity
 - 3.1.2 Promoting inclusive volunteering
 - 3.1.3 Diversity in practice

- 3.2 There is a proactive approach to increasing volunteer diversity, addressing under-representation, and including targeted groups as part of the organisation's inclusion, equity and diversity aims**
 - 3.2.1 Monitoring
 - 3.2.2 Addressing under-representation

- 3.3 Information about volunteering opportunities is made as widely available as possible using a range of methods and there is active engagement with a diverse range of people**
 - 3.3.1 Developing a volunteer recruitment message
 - 3.3.2 Reaching a diverse range of potential volunteers

- 3.4 Where possible there is a wide range of accessible opportunities that can be adapted throughout the volunteer's journey**

3.1 The organisation is inclusive and managed in a way that encourages the involvement of and is welcoming to a wide range of people

A volunteer involving organisation needs to think about its policy and practice in relation to inclusion, equity and diversity. This will involve creating a welcoming environment that actively supports 'difference' and takes people's needs into account, so people can choose to fully participate in and shape the collective. It also involves thinking about what image is portrayed to volunteers, staff, service users and the general public, and how this image and other information is communicated to them.

3.1.1 Creating a culture of inclusion, diversity and equity

The first thing is to create the right culture for your organisation by recognising the importance of inclusion, diversity and equity, and the negative impact if this is not part of your culture.

Equality is about fairness, ensuring that individuals or groups are not treated less favourably because of their protected characteristics, e.g. age, gender, disability, race. However, it also means equality of opportunity, ensuring that those who may be disadvantaged in some way get the tools they need to access the same, fair

opportunities as their peers. The right culture will ensure that all volunteers are able to get involved and are not treated less fairly than others.

Diversity is recognising, respecting and celebrating each other's differences. A diverse environment is one with a wide range of backgrounds and mindsets, which allows for an empowered culture of creativity. This is one of the many reasons that organisations involve volunteers, as it allows them to open up their organisation to and benefit from the range of diversity that exists in a community- [An Introduction](#) (section A.4).

Diversity in volunteering does not just have to be a varied base of volunteers, it can also be a variety of roles that volunteers can carry out. This means not just different kinds of tasks and activities, but different opportunities at different levels that offer different patterns of volunteering to facilitate the skills, experiences, preferences and availability of a wide range of people. It follows that if you offer a diverse range of opportunities, you will attract a diverse range of people.

Inclusion means creating an environment where everyone feels welcome and valued. This means you must ensure that everyone embraces the culture of the organisation and you make it clear that discrimination, victimisation or bullying are not tolerated. This will be reflected in your policies ([see section 3.1.3](#)) and should be communicated in all organisational information, e.g. inductions, newsletters, handbooks, social media, website. Images used on all materials must portray an inclusive culture. Any processes or procedures used must reflect the diverse nature of the range of people that will be expected to use them- [See section 3.1.2](#)

3.1.2 Promoting inclusive volunteering

Information about the organisation should contain statements about inclusion, equity and diversity where appropriate, and contain images that represent an inclusive culture. This applies to all materials, not just volunteer recruitment materials, so potential volunteers and existing volunteers get a positive impression of the organisation and its work and feel that they are truly welcome.

It would be very good practice to incorporate diversity into the process for proofing all materials and publications that your organisation produces. Be aware of the language and imagery you use and what implicit messages they send. Think about resources and tools you might need to provide materials in alternative formats or languages.

In particular, examine your practices for recruiting volunteers. Where do you place recruitment advertisements and materials- are certain groups unlikely to have access to them there? Think about the format of recruitment materials too. Are they inaccessible to those with visual impairments, literacy problems, or those who do not have English as their first language? Does the imagery or language appeal to certain groups only? Do you make use of the widest range of media to enable potential volunteers to contact you quickly and conveniently? How user-friendly are your systems for responding to such contacts and matching potential volunteers to appropriate roles? It is very important to implement some flexibility in your systems to be accessible to the greatest range of volunteers- see [Resource Guide 4](#) (sections 4.1 and 4.2).

Develop an internal communications strategy to ensure the two-way flow of information and opinions, particularly between management/staff and volunteers/service users. Could notice boards, news sheets, email updates, social media posts, or opening up staff meetings to volunteers make information more accessible? Could suggestion boxes, focus groups, exit interviews or evaluation processes facilitate feedback? See [Resource Guide 5](#) (section 5.4).

Ensuring that the opportunities you have to offer are suitable for a diverse range of volunteers is also a vital element in promoting inclusive volunteering. Think about the kinds of roles you offer, the time commitment, the location, etc. Also consider if there are other ways to design them, so as for example, people with disabilities or full-time employed people could access them and be able to contribute- see [Resource Guide 1](#) (section 1.1.2).

3.1.3 Diversity in practice

Having an equity, diversity and inclusion policy is important, but make sure that you include specific reference to volunteers and volunteering, and include a statement on equal opportunities and diversity in your volunteer policy- see [Promoting Equality and Diversity in Volunteering](#): Appendix 1.

Volunteer Now has worked with the Equality Commission to develop Eight Equality Standards for promoting equality of opportunity and diversity in volunteering. The standards are as follows:

A volunteer-involving organisation seeking to promote diversity and equality of opportunity will:

1. Commit to Promoting Equality and Diversity
2. Allocate Appropriate Resources
3. Encourage Fair Participation for All
4. Develop Inclusive and Diverse Volunteer Opportunities
5. Protect Volunteers from Harassment
6. Promote Fair and Transparent Recruitment
7. Communicate Clear and Fair Procedures
8. Support Diverse Individual Needs

In order to put this into practice, there will be a range of actions that you will need to implement. Go to [Promoting Equality and Diversity in Volunteering](#) to explore measurable equality action indicators for each standard.

In summary, a proactive and visible way to put a diversity policy into practice is to review the practical arrangements you make with volunteers including:

- How you welcome and help volunteers to become part of the organisation;
- The reimbursement processes for out-of-pocket expenses;
- The accessibility of locations for voluntary work and meetings;
- The flexibility in the timing of voluntary work and meetings and the amount of time volunteers are asked to commit;
- The ways in which you meet support and development needs of volunteers with a range of support needs; and
- The communication regarding processes for volunteers who want/would benefit from time out or longer breaks.

3.2 There is a proactive approach to increasing volunteer diversity, addressing under-representation, and including targeted groups as part of the organisation's inclusion, equity and diversity aims.

Thinking about inclusion, equity and diversity of volunteers will be most effective if it is part of the organisation's wider approach to representing the community and taking a proactive approach to tackling oppression, disadvantage, institutional prejudice, and discrimination. You will need to think through the bigger picture in relation to organisational aims and service user needs to inform the volunteer programme.

3.2.1 Monitoring

If you don't already monitor the diversity of your volunteer teams, then you need to find a way of knowing who you already have before you can consider increasing your diversity. Conduct an audit of volunteers in your organisation to discover who already volunteers with you, and to identify which groups or characteristics are missing.

When auditing the diversity of your volunteers, do not forget who is leading your organisation. Review the make-up of your management committee/Board of Trustees and discuss with them how a more diverse range of committee members might be recruited, perhaps by targeting individuals with certain characteristics. You may also consider building requirements for representation of key groups into the nomination process.

Most importantly, you could consider setting up a monitoring system so that you can collect demographic information on the make-up of your volunteers in a systematic way. That way, you can keep a close eye on whether or not your volunteer base is reflecting the diversity of the community you serve. This can be done anonymously at the recruitment stage- see [Monitoring Diversity and Equality of Opportunity in Volunteering](#); and [Sample Equality Monitoring Review Format](#).

Note: There is no legal requirement to collect this information for volunteers, but it is considered best practice, because it demonstrates a commitment to providing equity for all volunteers. If you do decide to carry out monitoring then data protection principles must be adhered to and a clear rationale provided for why you are monitoring, what you will be monitoring, who is doing it, and how you will collect, use and store the data. It is not appropriate for many organisations, especially small ones where the volunteer base is so small that you could not collect any meaningful data and ensure confidentiality. However, it is helpful to ask and listen to stakeholders as well as volunteers, to find out their views on how they think the organisation is doing with regard to diversity and get some suggestions for improvement. You could ask volunteers about the kind of tasks they carry out and how the work is organised. Try to find out if doing different things, or things in different ways could assist them in their volunteering and help you better embrace diversity.

3.2.2 Addressing under-representation

Whether you proactively monitor or not, the most important thing is to address any gaps that you become aware of. An action plan clearly looking at ways to reach out to those groupings is a good tool.

Note though that organisations can have different target groups for potential volunteers. For some, the organisation's target group may be everyone in a local community, or it could be a particular community of people, e.g. those with a specific health condition, young people, or people with particular skills. Within this broader target group, organisations should consider the make-up of that community, e.g. age, 'race', ethnicity, disability, sex, gender and gender identity, faith, sexual orientation and socio-economic disadvantage, to ensure that volunteers are as far as possible representative, and/or there is targeted recruitment in line with specific inclusion, equity and diversity objectives. Service users' needs should also be considered, for example, recruiting volunteers who speak community languages.

Organisations may restrict opportunities to specific groups where there is a rationale for this and it does not breach the spirit of equality and anti-discrimination legislation,

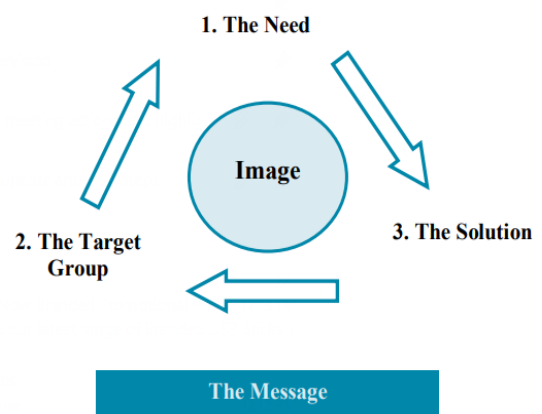
for example, recruiting female volunteers for a service for women who have experienced violence. For more information on involving a diverse range of volunteers:

- [Diversity in Volunteering Information Sheet](#)
- [Involving People with Disabilities Info Sheet](#)
- [Involving Children as Volunteers](#)
- [Jump on Board](#)
- [Ex-Offenders and Volunteering](#)
- [Older People and Volunteering Checklist](#)

Practical activities to increase the diversity of volunteers may include addressing barriers to volunteer involvement and will include in some instances the need to seek resources, e.g. create materials in other languages, facilitate face-to-face engagement, or use of interpreters or signers- see [Barriers to Volunteering](#); and [Section 3.3](#), for ideas on how to reach out to potential volunteers.

3.3 Information about volunteering opportunities is made as widely available as possible using a range of methods and there is active engagement with a diverse range of people

It is really important to think through *what* it is that you are saying to the general public about your opportunities to volunteer and also *how* you are saying it. The challenge is making sure that you are getting a message that will attract people and making sure the message reaches, and is understood by, a diverse range of people. Your organisation faces fierce competition for volunteers' time, not just from other volunteer-involving organisations, but from the vast range of alternative leisure pursuits available. If you want your volunteering opportunities to even register as an option, you need to raise public awareness of your organisation, the work it does and the opportunities it provides to become involved in that work. It can be helpful to think about attracting volunteers in terms of 'selling' volunteering and recruitment as a marketing exercise.



3.3.1 Your volunteer recruitment message

Image is central to any marketing process, and it will also be important when you come to promoting volunteer opportunities. An organisation's image is made up of all the perceptions and assumptions that people hold about it, and that may not always match the organisation's image itself! You need to think about what might appeal to potential volunteers about your organisation, the work you do, and how you do it. These could form some of the basic 'selling points' when trying to promote your volunteer opportunities. Always try to address barriers (perceived or actual) so they do not undermine the positive aspects of the organisation's image and make recruiting volunteers harder- see [Barriers to Volunteering](#).

Your message should be short, snappy and easy to understand. It needs to get across the key points about the role while selling the benefits of doing it. Remember ['An Introduction'](#) (section B.2) and the importance of the two-way relationship- see [Reaching a Diverse Range of Potential Volunteers](#) (section A), for information on the content of a recruitment message.

3.3.2 Reaching a diverse range of potential volunteers

There are a wide range of ways of communicating that you need volunteers and it is clear that attracting the right number and type of volunteers is a little more involved than putting a 'volunteers needed' advertisement in the local paper. In summary, the six key principles below sum up the things that need to be in place before you even think of going public to recruit volunteers:

1. Organisations must have a clear value base for involving volunteers which includes equity, diversity and inclusion;
2. The needs of the organisation and the needs of the volunteer must be met;
3. Full information about roles and what is required, as well as details on what is in it for the volunteer should be available;
4. Organisations need to address barriers and make it easy for all different types of people to volunteer;
5. A well thought through recruitment message that gives key information and reflects a positive image of the organisation and the volunteering opportunity is essential; and
6. A clear strategy is identified that uses a variety of methods to reach a range of people who could carry out the role.

Who does or does not hear your message depends on the media you use and the recruitment methods you implement. So how do you get your message out to the people who need to hear about it, and most of all to a diverse range of people? Click here to explore a range of recruitment methods- see [Reaching a diverse range of potential volunteers](#) (section B&C).

3.4 Where possible there is a wide range of accessible opportunities that can be adapted throughout the volunteer's journey

Where possible, it helps to recruit the widest range of volunteers if there is a **menu of opportunities** to choose from. Opportunities that require different skills, qualities, time commitment, etc, mean you will attract a diverse range of people. It also means that people can move around and develop within roles.

Volunteers' interests, needs or abilities may change over time so where possible the organisation should try to be flexible and accommodate this to help the volunteer remain involved by having roles and activities that can be created or **adapted** to meet varying volunteer needs. This can be done during planning, recruitment and/or ongoing involvement and should certainly be documented in induction materials and volunteer handbooks. Creating and adapting roles needs to be undertaken within the aims and the resources of the organisation including reviewing service user needs and feedback. There may be times when it is not possible to adapt roles, for example when they are defined in legislation.

Organisations should consider how different access arrangements or additional support, or technology/equipment for volunteers can be offered, particularly for volunteers with disabilities or those whose first language is not English. Accessible opportunities should take into account what people are looking for from their volunteering experience and how they want to give their time. This may involve flexible and one-off opportunities, family volunteering, or online volunteering for example;

- [Family Volunteering Information Sheet;](#)
- [Occasional Volunteering Information Sheet;](#)
- [Social Action Toolkit](#)

Where possible opportunities should be written down. Regardless of the size of the organisation and the nature of the task, the organisation will need to ensure that people are clear about the boundaries of activities and the skills, attributes, knowledge or experience (if any) needed to undertake the tasks. For a [Volunteer Role Description Template](#) and to get more information, see [Developing Volunteer Roles](#), and [Writing Volunteer Opportunities](#).

Some organisations have opportunities tightly defined, for example, statutory roles or those that require technical knowledge, or where there are strict health and safety requirements. Where this is the case, the organisation should consider whether volunteers have choices, for example about undertaking specific activities within the role, the times at which they can volunteer or whether there are opportunities for activities outside the role, for example, training or buddying other volunteers.

A plan for volunteer recruitment

1. Why does the organisation want to involve volunteers?
2. What does the organisation want volunteers to do?
3. What qualities/skills will these volunteers need to have?
4. How will the organisation find volunteers?
5. How will the organisation select which volunteers it wants?
6. How will the organisation manage the volunteers after selection?

See [Recruitment plan for volunteers information sheet](#)