

DIVERSITY IN VOLUNTEERING

INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

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, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, etc.

The aim of this information 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.

Volunteering is

‘The commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one’s immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice.’

1. What is diversity in volunteering?

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 interlinked. 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.

2. What is a diverse volunteer involving organisation?

A diverse organisation is one which:

- Views individuals as unique
- Is welcoming to everyone
- Recognises that people with different experiences bring fresh ideas and make the work more relevant and accessible
- Is innovative and creative
- Involves volunteers at all levels, carrying out all kinds of roles.

3. 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 it is in. In particular, consider how your volunteer teams 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.

4. 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.

5. Is diversity the same as equal opportunities?

Equal opportunities recognise that certain groups have been discriminated against, so it usually focuses on specific groups of people, e.g. targeting recruitment at women. Diversity is about celebrating and valuing how different we all are and therefore focuses on facilitating each individual to become involved, whatever their needs.

6. Good Practice Checklist

Different organisations are at various levels of development with regards to volunteering. You should build diversity into your volunteer policies and procedures, e.g. your volunteer policy and value base, your recruitment or support procedures. If you are doing this for the first time, then you can ensure that diversity is a key factor of your volunteer strategy.

Below is a list of practical things that you might find helpful to begin looking at diversity in volunteering:

- Create a 'Welcome Statement' that goes in all your recruitment materials and is displayed on a prominent notice board in your organisation. A welcome statement should be a positive statement of how your organisation welcomes volunteers from diverse backgrounds and the valuable contribution a diverse volunteer pool makes to the organisation.
- Review your volunteer policies and procedures, in particular making sure that diversity is reflected throughout and that they are accessible to all.
- Draw up an Equal Opportunities Policy that clearly states volunteers will not be discriminated against.
- Audit your volunteers, including your management committee on a regular basis. Find out what kind of people volunteer with you already and identify what groups of people are missing. Target underrepresented groups to try and increase diversity.
- 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.
- 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? What are the images you are using on your flyers, website, display stands, etc?
- 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 volunteers' 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 respect holidays associated with certain cultures?
 - 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?

- Do you allow flexibility for volunteers who need time off for medical appointments, storage for medication, etc?
- Do you respect confidentiality of volunteers where they have chosen to share information, e.g. about sexuality or health?
- Do you provide extra support if some volunteers need it?
- Ensure that all staff members and volunteers are aware of your culture and ethos regarding diversity and that they get training on your equal opportunities policy, as well as diversity training around respecting differences in the team.
- 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.
- 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. How will you communicate and help others to communicate with those people whose first language is not English?
- Challenge inappropriate language or discrimination: ensure that you have a clear procedure in place to deal with these issues in relation to volunteers.
- 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.

7. Where can we get help?

For information on all areas of involving volunteers contact:

Volunteer Now

Skanius Centre
239 Newtownards Road
Belfast BT4 1AF
Tel: 028 9023 2020
Email: info@volunteernow.co.uk
Website: www.volunteernow.co.uk

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

Bryson Intercultural

(formally Multi-Cultural Resource Centre)
Bryson House
28 Bedford Street Belfast
BT2 7FE
Tel: 028 9043 8265
Email: info@brysonintercultural.org
Website: www.brysonintercultural.org

For information on involving young people contact:

The Youth Team

Volunteer Now

The Skainos Centre, 241 Newtownards Road,

Belfast BT4 1AF

Tel: 028 9023 2020

Email: info@volunteernow.co.uk

Website: www.volunteernow.co.uk

For information on disability issues contact:

Disability Action NI

Portside Business Park

189 Airport Road West

Belfast BT3 9ED

Tel: 028 9029 7880

Email: hq@disabilityaction.org

Website: www.disabilityaction.org

Action on Hearing Loss

4 -8 Adelaide Street

Belfast BT2 8GA

Tel: 028 9023 9619

Textphone: 028 9024 9462

Email: information.nireland@hearingloss.org.uk

Website: www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Blind Centre for Northern Ireland

RNIB

Victoria House

15 – 17 Gloucester House

Belfast BT1 4LS

Tel: 028 9032 9373

Email: rnibni@rnib.org.uk

Website: www.rnib.org.uk

Inspire NI

Lombard House

10 – 20 Lombard Street

Belfast BT1 1ED

Tel: 028 9032 8474

Email: hello@inspirewellbeing.org

Website: www.inspirewellbeing.org

Mencap

5 School Road

Castlereagh

Belfast BT8 7US

Tel: 028 9069 1351

Email: helpline.ni@menicap.org

Website: www.northernireland.mencap.org

For information on involving older people contact:

Age NI

3 Lower Crescent
Belfast BT7 1NR
Tel: 028 9024 5729 (Main Office)
Tel: 0808 8087575 (Advice Line)
Email: info@ageni.org
Website: www.ageuk.org.uk

For Information on sexual orientation contact:

Coalition on Sexual Orientation (COSO)

64 Donegall Street
Belfast BT1 2GT
Tel: 028 9089 0201
Email: admin@coso.org.uk

Rainbow Project

23 – 31 Waring Street
Belfast BT1 2DX
20 Strand Road
Orlan House
Londonderry BT48 7AB
Tel: 028 9031 9030 (Belfast)
Tel: 028 7128 3030 (Londonderry)
Email: info@rainbow-project.org
Website: www.rainbow-project.org

If you are involving volunteers who inform you about an illness or condition that they are managing, you may find it useful to google for a local organisation that could provide you with more information.

Useful publications:

[Promoting Equality And Diversity In Volunteering - Volunteer Now](#)

Disclaimer

Reasonable precautions have been taken to ensure information in this publication is accurate. However it is not intended to be legally comprehensive; it is designed to provide guidance in good faith without accepting liability. If relevant, we therefore recommend you take appropriate professional advice before taking any action on the matters covered herein. Charity Registration No. NIC101309. Company Limited by Guarantee No. NI602399. Registered in Northern Ireland. Volunteer Now, Skainos Centre, 239 Newtownards Road, Belfast, BT4 1AF. T: 028 9023 2020 E: info@volunteernow.co.uk W: www.volunteernow.co.uk