

OVER 50's & VOLUNTEERING: CHECKLIST

A good practice checklist for organisations involving older people (50+) as volunteers. This checklist is based on research carried out with volunteers and non-volunteers aged 50+ in Northern Ireland.

Attracting the Older Volunteer

It's important to have an understanding of your volunteering demographic both internally and within your local community. The latest research from NISRA (Continuous Household Survey 2024) can be helpful: [Experience of Volunteering by Adults in NI - New Statistics - Volunteer Now](#)

- Directly target the older age group, rather than using non-specific advertising. Make sure older people feel like they are valued for the unique skills they can offer. Also, recruitment campaigns are more likely to succeed if followed up by efforts to make personal contact.
- Using multiple methods for promoting volunteering will maximise your reach - newspapers are the main way that older people source local information. Other commonly used mediums include word of mouth and the internet. Internet usage amongst the 50+ age group is growing and a powerful way of getting your message across.
- Market volunteering to older people as something which can fit around their lifestyle and which they can make a real contribution to.
- Make potential volunteers aware of both the benefits to themselves as well as to others i.e. physical and mental health benefits, opportunity to make new friends, to learn new skills, to use or pass on existing skills, to have fun!
- Make sure that you communicate that age is not a barrier to volunteer involvement.
- Keep paperwork to a minimum and ensure that you refrain from using formalised language i.e. use 'registration form' rather than 'application form', 'informal chat' rather than 'interview'.
- People aged 50+ prefer the terms older, experienced, over 50, over 60. They have mixed feelings or dislike for terms such as old people, senior or third ager.
- Newer recruitment techniques, such as 'taster sessions', 'turn up and try' and 'come along with a friend' are effective ways of encouraging people to experience volunteering without fearing that they are committing themselves before they are ready to. Flexible volunteering roles are as equally attractive to this age group as it is to younger people.
- Offering a range of roles with varied commitment levels will help to attract a more diverse range of people from the older age group i.e. is there potential to offer regular and occasional volunteering opportunities? What about volunteering which people can do from their own home or as a group? You may be able to create family/events volunteering opportunities so that they can bring those they care for with them. Opportunities like fundraising events, outdoor environmental programmes or activity preparation etc. would all be good roles.

- Recruitment drives and volunteering opportunities which are close to an individual's home / in their local area can often be more appealing for an older person. Consider offering roles which older people can do in their own homes i.e. crafts, making phone calls and admin tasks like proofing documents, preparing information packs etc.

Involving the Older Volunteer

- Match what your marketing messages have promised to the reality of the roles that you offer!
- Older volunteers are not a homogenous group, like other age groups, they will come with a wide range of skills, experience and interests. Make the most of the skills on offer by thinking about how they can support your organisation. People in their 50's are seeking out meaningful, interesting roles which allow them to learn new skills as well as sharing existing ones.
- Build flexibility into the volunteering role to allow older people to carry on as other things change in their life. Be prepared to adapt roles to suit the changing health of an older person, rather than accepting that they will automatically leave the organisation / programme.

Retaining the Older Volunteer

- Avoid the most common obstacles for the retention of older volunteers by ensuring that they are not overloaded with requests for help or made to feel like they are being taken for granted. Having good communication with your volunteers will help to ensure that they remain satisfied.
- Give older volunteers the opportunity to undertake training to develop their skills. Training should be given in a variety of formats to suit various preferred methods of learning. Remember, for some, it may have been a long time since they have done this.
- Share the impact of their volunteering on a regular basis. Don't wait until an AGM or annual event. Ask the volunteer what recognition is meaningful to them so that whatever you do is meaningful and appropriate.
- Overall, follow good practice in the management of volunteers, in all instances. For example, have appropriate policies and procedures in place i.e. volunteer policy, equal opportunities policy, recruitment and selection, induction, training, support and supervision. Reimbursing out of pocket expense will make it easier for older people to volunteer on a longer-term basis. It is also important to show recognition i.e. social events, saying thank you.

Disclaimer

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