

REACHING A DIVERSE RANGE OF POTENTIAL VOLUNTEERS

Once you have identified activities that need done by volunteers, and have developed a message that sells your opportunities, you need to think about how you are going to reach people that might actually be able to do what you need. You need to communicate directly with people when recruiting volunteers, but the information you send out will reach some groups of people more easily than others.

Who does and doesn't hear your message depends on what it says (the **content**) and how your message is directed (the **recruitment method**).

A. Message Content

First of all, let's talk about the **content** of the message. Obviously, it is vital to give prospective volunteers sufficient accurate information to help them decide if your organisation or volunteer role is the one for them. Furthermore, your recruitment message is likely to be your first contact with potential volunteers, so it is important to create the right first impression. If you don't grab someone's attention in the first minute or so, they are unlikely to keep listening, reading or watching.

So, staying with the idea of 'marketing' or 'selling' volunteering, we can think of the recruitment message as an advertisement, whatever form it actually takes. The purpose of the advertisement is just to motivate people to get in touch with you. More detailed information about the organisation and the role can follow later, so **keep it short and simple**.

So, what do they need to know?

The two key issues that the message needs to convey to the target group are the **need** and the **solution**. Your recruitment message should open by describing the basic need you are trying to address. Why does the work need to be done? What will happen if it isn't? If the work is with a particular client group, you may want to focus on how their quality of life is enhanced by the work done- the impact that volunteers make.

Next, it should tell the individual what they could do about the need. What does the voluntary work involve, and how does that tackle the problem? These two pieces of information should enable an individual to make an initial decision on whether the work is of interest to him/her. However, they may also raise subsequent issues that need to be addressed before prospective volunteers are persuaded to do something about it. First and foremost, the description of the problem and/or of the work may raise **fears**, primarily about their ability to do the work or cope with the identified problem. Fears can become barriers that prevent people from volunteering. Your recruitment campaign should not only sell what the role offers, but also relieve people's fears.

For example, a financial worry that volunteering may cost money to do, is relieved by knowing 'out-of-pocket expenses are reimbursed'; being nervous about having to complete training as it some time since you were in formal education can be relieved by knowing it is 'fun and relaxed training' and 'support is offered'; worries of over commitment is relieved by being given a realistic idea of how much time each week/month is required for the role and the level of flexibility within this. However, it is important to remember that some barriers cannot be removed. If your youth club opens on a Friday night, then you need volunteers that are free on a Friday night- there is no flexibility with this.

The other question that is likely to occur to the would-be volunteer is why they should devote their time and energy to this work over and above any other, so try to finish by highlighting **the benefits** that volunteering brings for the volunteer. People look for different things in a volunteering experience. Your recruitment message should give a snapshot of the benefits of volunteering that will appeal to a range of people. Remember point one of the recruitment plan- *Volunteering is a two-way process!*

What can your organisation offer a volunteer?

- Training
- Skills development
- Fun
- A social network
- Support
- Flexibility
- A chance to make a difference to someone's life or local community.

You could bring your message to life by providing positive quotes from present volunteers, images of volunteers having fun, attending training/events, describing the impact of their volunteering, etc., and these can all help promote your opportunities.

All that needs to be added is what the volunteer should do next, i.e. who to contact and how. Again, maximise the options to increase accessibility by including a telephone number and email address. Try to give a name rather than a job title for the contact- it is much friendlier!

B. How will you communicate your message?

You will need to give some thought to the media you use and to the timing of your recruitment message. Your choice of media may be dictated to some extent by cost and availability, but where possible, you should try to use media that best suit your chosen recruitment method, the role you are recruiting for, and your target audience. Remember about inclusive volunteering and all the things you must keep in mind with the media you choose.

Some ideas for media to be used include:

- Social media
- Community service announcements
- Local press advertisements
- Word of mouth
- Articles in newspapers
- Presentations to local groups
- Open days
- Be Collective
- Volunteer Centres
- Leaflets and flyers
- Videos and podcasts
- Organisation website
- Internet sites and message boards
- A message on your answerphone
- Direct mailings
- E-Groups
- Messages on your franked post
- Church bulletins

- Email signatures
- Posters and billboards

The timing of your message will be influenced mainly by when your target audience is most likely to see and/or hear the message. For example, a community service announcement targeting the parents of school-age children should not be broadcast during the post-school rush. Think also about the time of year- students are less likely to see, let alone respond to posters placed in the students' union during exam time. Be wary too of coinciding with other major events, i.e. potential football coaches may be difficult to reach on a cup final weekend!

C. Recruitment Methods

There are a number of different methods of recruitment to keep in mind when thinking about how you communicate with your audiences.

1. Warm Body

'Warm Body' recruitment involves spreading your message as widely as possible- to any 'warm body' in fact. The assumption is that the more people hear about your volunteering opportunities, the more people will respond. This is a rather 'blunt instrument' in recruitment terms and is really only suited to particular types of volunteer roles. When you need to recruit large numbers of volunteers for roles which do not require specific skills or a high level of commitment, e.g. street collectors or stewards at a one-off event, warm body recruitment is possibly the best approach.

Use social media posts, e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, print or broadcast media, e.g. newspapers, posters, community service announcements, to reach a mass audience, but think carefully about the timing and content of your message. Be aware that one potential problem with warm body recruitment is that you can be too successful! How will you handle large numbers of enquiries? If you find yourself having to turn away too many would-be volunteers, you may find your successful recruitment campaign turning into a public relations disaster.

2. Targeted Recruitment

The other most common approach to recruitment is **'targeted recruitment'**, more similar to the approach used to recruit paid staff. This focuses resources on identifying the particular 'type' of person needed for a role and then designing the campaign to reach them. Therefore, it is most appropriate when designing the campaign to reach them. Therefore, it is most appropriate when the volunteer role requires specific skills or qualities and/or a higher level of commitment. Targeted recruitment works best when the qualities you are looking for are clearly identifiable and observable, as this makes it easier to communicate these requirements in your recruitment message.

Obviously this approach requires more time and effort than warm body recruitment, but it also gives you more control and has a high success rate when done well. It can also be very economical as you can use any media that will reach your target group, including asking 'target' individual directly! For example, if you are looking for people with knowledge of/interest in working with young people, one strategy might be to recruit from childcare and social work courses at the local colleges.

3. Concentric Circles

Finally, one of the most consistently successful methods for recruiting volunteers is the **'concentric circles' model**. This approach capitalises on the 'ripple' effect of involving people

already connected with your organisation to recruit new volunteers from among their own contacts. It can work for any type of volunteer role and can be very economical as it is done mainly via word of mouth. However, you will need good back-up material, e.g. information packs.

Although it sounds like a 'lazy' way of recruiting, it requires a lot of effort to get it off the ground, as you need to create a culture where *everyone* in the organisation (paid staff, volunteers, service users, etc.) accept an individual responsibility for recruiting new volunteers. Even then, you will need to continue to inform, support and motivate your 'recruiters' to find the right people, for instance by providing good recruitment materials for them to use, and having an efficient and friendly procedure for dealing with would-be volunteers. If this method has one serious limitation, it is that it tends to attract more of the same kinds of people as your organisation already has, and therefore risks stifling diversity unless carefully monitored.

It is easy for organisations to 'get stuck in a rut' with a particular recruitment method. Think carefully about what you want from your recruitment campaign and don't be afraid to use a variety of recruitment methods. It is more likely that you will get interest from a greater diversity of people. It is common to use targeted recruitment techniques to reach those who traditionally have not volunteered with you before.

Finally, some things to keep in mind...

- ✓ Don't go public until your planning is complete.
- ✓ Be prepared to be proactive and go out looking for people- they won't necessarily come to you.
- ✓ Have a key contact who will get back to people promptly.
- ✓ Have information ready to give them,
- ✓ Use a variety of methods to reach the most diverse range of people and target those who may be under-represented.
- ✓ While keeping the process consistent, consider how you can be flexible and be prepared to tailor your approach to diverse needs.

Example: Selling a Volunteer Role

Role: Youth Leader

Main Sell

'Want to be an invaluable part of a fun, committed and lively team? Want to develop new skills in working with young people, or practice existing skills? We offer fun, relaxed training, a chance to meet new people, great support and we reimburse out-of-pocket expenses.'

Further Details

'Presently, youth leaders meet every Wednesday (6.30-9.30pm) with occasional planning meetings approximately once every two months. We are flexible and supportive of volunteers who have caring or other responsibilities.'

If interested

'Curious? Contact our friendly coordinator Joe Bloggs for more details, or pop into the office and see him at _____ -

T: 028 ---- ----

E: Joe@email.com

PLANNING YOUR CAMPAIGN

1. What is the role?

List the basic details of the role using your role description/volunteer specification:

Title: _____

Purpose: _____

Tasks: _____

Requirements: _____

Pros & Cons: _____

What do they do instead? _____

Where do they do it? _____

How do we communicate with them? (Media, timing). _____

2. Who would want to do this work and why?

In marketing language the 'why' is their 'motivational factor' and you will want to appeal to this in your 'advertisement'. For instance, do they (or did they) use some of the required skills in other contexts, e.g. paid work. On the other hand, they may be looking for a complete change from their daily routine at work or home. Perhaps they want to gain the skills/experience involved in the voluntary work for use in another context, e.g. to find or change jobs, or the issue has a personal significance for them or their family?

Who would want to do this? _____

Why? _____

Motivational factor: _____

3. What do they do instead of volunteering with you? Where do they do it?

This should give you some ideas about where and how to distribute your recruitment materials. Does your target group go to particular kinds of venues where you could place posters or leaflets? Do they read particular newspapers or specialist publications in which you could place an advert or a flyer. Do they watch TV or listen to the radio at a particular time when you could broadcast a community service announcement? Do they visit particular websites where you could advertise?

4. What do we say? Who/what will say it?

Finally, work out how you can grab their attention and encourage them to get in touch. Describe the need and the solution, address their fears and highlight the benefits. How do they get in touch? When you have worked out the basic content of your message, you need to think about presentation. Can you compose a one-sentence 'headline' that appeals to their 'motivational factor'? Think about the language you use. Use references they recognise. Avoid jargon, unless it belongs to the target group. Be careful with humour! Then think about what imagery can you use- a person or object- that will appeal to the target group? This is known as the 'spokesperson' and should be someone/thing they identify with, admire or aspire to.

The message: _____

Headline: _____

Spokesperson/Thing: _____

Image: _____

