



➔ FACTSHEET 4

Recruiting and managing volunteers



Even large, well-established advocacy and support groups depend on their unpaid volunteers, so recruiting the best volunteers to inspire others and build your group is very important. You may well be competing with other groups seeking to recruit volunteers, so you must make sure that your volunteers feel that their time is well spent, their work is valued and that their contributions are appreciated.

➔ Working with volunteers effectively

People have many reasons for offering to help your group. Many feel passionate about your cause, but some also want to socialise and make new friends, while others want to become part of your network to develop their skills and experience, perhaps with a view to eventually moving into paid work. But advocacy groups that effectively recruit, manage and retain their volunteers consider the following:

Set goals and plan recruitment of volunteers

- **Define your objectives** about how volunteers are involved in influencing the group's strategy and activities.
- **Understand your own needs and limitations:** why do you need volunteers (for a specific project or for long term support)? How many volunteers can you manage effectively? This may depend on the size of your organisation, resources, available time, etc.
- **Understand what motivates someone** to become a volunteer, and match this to your objectives.
- **Check out any legal requirements** in your country (for example, liability insurance, health and safety regulations.)
- **Formulate a policy and plan** that describes the full process from identifying the roles of volunteers, the objectives of volunteer engagement, tools to achieve those, the execution of the plan as well as evaluation mechanism. This process should be followed by everyone involved in managing your volunteers.
- **Advertise volunteering opportunities** in as many places as possible to increase the number and type of new volunteers and their range of skills. But be very specific on the type of skills you need.
- **Retain a potential volunteer's interest** by ensuring that the initial contact, processing their application, any relevant checks, induction and deciding their role take place as rapidly as possible.

Provide leadership and good management:

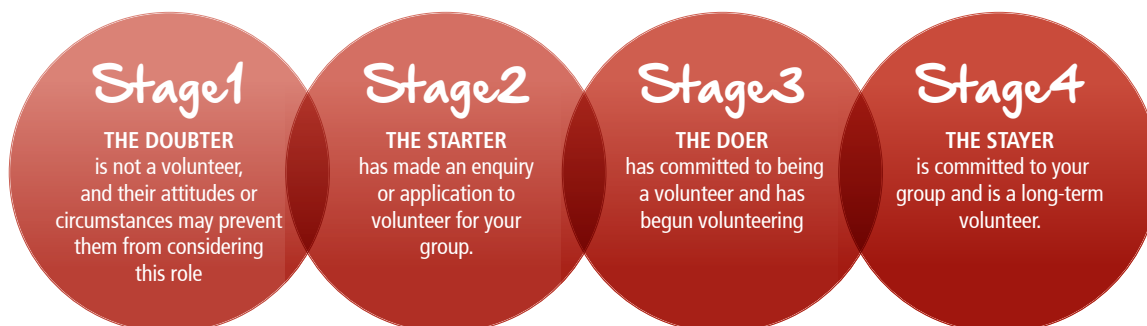
- **Give your volunteers responsibility and a clear, written framework** in which they can operate, including their rights and obligations to your group.
- **Ensure that new volunteers are clear about their role and the support they can expect.** Think about preparing a manual as a guide for your volunteers throughout their involvement with your group.
- **Be clear on your group's overall governance and structure:** who has which role and who decides what in your group? Nothing is more frustrating for volunteers than not knowing who takes decisions when they need advice!
- **Have a named person to support your volunteers,** and a volunteer handbook and application form for all staff to use, and a complaints procedure.



- **Have a named person to support your volunteers**, and a volunteer handbook and application form for all staff to use, and a complaints procedure.
- **Retain and grow your volunteers: offer them** education and training, review their progress, identify new opportunities, provide information on health and safety, and process their expenses quickly.
- **Ensure volunteers are among the first people to hear news** about your group's successes and achievements. This will help retain their motivation.
- **Celebrate volunteers' individual successes.** Show them that their contributions are recognised and valued: e.g. organise annual awards for volunteers. Demonstrate how their work has contributed to the overall success of your group.
- **Take the time to listen to your volunteers' feedback.** Concerns and motivation may change over time and it is important to take this into account in order to retain/recruit volunteers.
- **Care for your volunteers.** Supporting cancer patients and facing loss can be very distressing, and you might not realise how your volunteers feel. Make sure you care for your carers, and consider appointing psychosocial mentor who is independent of your group's management.
- **Keep a sense of humour!** No matter how great the pressure, a positive atmosphere is key to retaining volunteers.
- **Make volunteers your ambassadors.** Don't expect a volunteer to stay for a long time, but make sure they are positive about the organisation and happy to have contributed when they leave.

➡ Overcoming volunteering barriers

Research¹ shows that volunteers become involved in any group in four stages:



1. For more information, see Gaskin K. A choice blend: what volunteers want from organisation and management. A report for the Institute of Volunteering Research and the England Volunteering Forum. April 2003: <http://www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/Institute-of-Volunteering-Research/Migrated-Resources/Documents/C/choice-blend-report-for-printing.pdf>

At each of these stages, there are barriers to recruiting and retaining volunteers, but these can be overcome to ensure that volunteers can continue to help your group to fulfil its remit:

Stage	Barriers	Overcoming barriers
The doubter	Lack of awareness of the need for volunteers, or how to find out about volunteering.	Advertise for volunteers on your website, approach other local organisations (e.g. faith groups), attend public events, offer to give talks about your work.
	Perceptions of volunteering: e.g. only for retired people and not for young, employed people.	Aim to recruit volunteers of all ages and backgrounds, and include them in your advertising.
The starter	Recruitment process is too time consuming, formal and impersonal.	Make the first interview informal, to avoid intimidating the volunteer. Provide only brief written information on the role and background to your group. Tell the volunteer when you will contact them with a decision.
	Tasks offered do not meet the volunteer's abilities and potential.	Do not assume that volunteers are just for boring, menial tasks. Also offer work based on each volunteer's experience and capabilities.
The doer	No effective induction into the organisation, and lack of clarity about expenses	Every volunteer should undergo immediate formal induction into your group, with a full explanation of their role. Ensure policies and procedures are clearly, especially expenses.
	No training, or the training was not applicable to the volunteer's role.	All volunteers should receive training that is appropriate for their role. Consider offering training that not only improves the volunteer's value to your group, but also leads to a qualification or accreditation for the individual.
The stayer	Poor management of volunteers: limited roles, poor communication and scheduling	Ensure your group is well organised, but that that management is flexible in assigning voluntary tasks. Include volunteers in internal communications, avoid last-minute rescheduling and respond to volunteers' concerns.
	Lack of commitment from managers and hostility from paid staff.	Develop a clear vision for the role of volunteers, and ensure all staff appreciate the value of their contributions.
	Lack of supervision and support for volunteers.	Provide each volunteer with a named mentor (e.g. a manager or more experienced volunteer), facilitate volunteer networks and social occasions.