

Good Practice Manual

Engaging University Students with Community Volunteering – Creating Active Citizens

Introduction

This guide is intended to be a basic introduction to the key issues with involved in setting up and developing a student volunteering programme. It has been designed to be particularly relevant to workers in this field who are new in post and / or institutions who are developing a new volunteering programme.

The guide was commissioned as part of a pilot study funded by the Russell Commission whose target audience is young people between 16 and 25 years old. Many of the issues raised will of course be relevant to University staff volunteers too but owing to the context of the pilot, this is not an area which is explored in this document.

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PART A – Context

1. Why students volunteer

• Personal motivations

Like any group of volunteers, personal life experience is a powerful motivation for volunteering amongst students. Individuals may want to use the skills and experience that they have to benefit others. Alternatively, they may find themselves in a particular situation and want to make the most of the opportunity.

Examples might include :

- routines instilled at home (e.g. helping out at a school or club where a parent teaches);
- disability, illness or disadvantage, affecting themselves, their family or friends;
- individual leisure pursuits (e.g. sports coaching)
- extra time on hands (e.g. leave of absence owing to a exam failure, bereavement or illness)
- changes in personal situation (e.g. re-location, relationship breakdown – want to meet people)

• Altruistic motives

Of course, it is debatable whether motivations for volunteering can ever be said to be wholly altruistic. There are always gains for both the volunteer and the user/organisation too. That said, many students have special reasons for wanting to give up their time.

Examples might include :

- personal faith or values (e.g. to fulfil sense of duty towards others or 'live out' beliefs);
- to give something back to others / local community;
- personal relationships (e.g. a friend, colleague or relative asked for help)
- awareness of need (e.g. publicity campaign highlighted impact on user)

• Career motivations

Students graduate into a highly competitive job market. Each year, over half a million students graduate with an average debt of £12,000. Students are under pressure to justify how their time is spent to tutors, parents and other sponsors. Volunteers will be keen on roles that help them to learn and achieve, develop skills relevant to their chosen career and offer some responsibility.

Examples might include :

- accreditation (e.g. participating in Duke of Edinburgh or Millenium Volunteers scheme);
- improve personal skills /attributes (e.g. to help with CV / job interviews/applications)
- work experience (e.g. make best use of vacations or take a gap year)

A good programme will offer a range of options which cater for the widest possible selection of personal interests and motivations.

2. Student Lifestyles

- **Demands of paid work**

Most students now pay for their education and have to work to support themselves. Juggling the demands of academic work and paid employment is not an easy task.

Erratic work patterns

Paid work can often mean odd or anti-social hours (e.g. bar work late at night or in early hours etc) or erratic time commitments (e.g. alternate shift patterns, being asked to work at short notice etc). For many students, opportunities for paid work have to be prioritised over other commitments, so flexibility is very important.

- **Study commitments**

Student timetables vary, some have lectures 9am-5pm everyday, others have 5 to 10 hours of tuition at odd hours throughout the week. For some, academic timetables change every 6 weeks and placements take them away from University for anything from 1 – 10 weeks at a time. As a rule of thumb, most students will just want to give an hour or two each week or each fortnight.

Exams & vacations

Most undergraduate students also have 3 weeks of exams in late January/early February and again in late May/early June. Coursework or practical skills are assessed regularly and a lot of students are under considerable pressure from parents and sponsors to achieve high grades.

Peak recruitment periods

Most of the student population are undergraduate students who live in their University city between October and June and go home for short breaks at Christmas and Easter. Some courses will also have a 'reading week' when there are no lectures, usually about half way through the semester.

As a general rule, good times to get students involved are October / November or in February when the National event 'Student Volunteering Week' is held. One-off events or short-term commitments (e.g. 6 weeks, 3 months) throughout the year, are also a good way of generating interest.

Other audiences

Smaller numbers of undergraduates are medical, dentistry or nursing students who, along with postgraduate, home, mature and international students, live in their University city all year round. As tuition fees rise, increasing numbers of students are now choosing studying in their home city. Changes in the marketplace like this need to be monitored and programmes adapted accordingly.

- **Time constraints**

Many student volunteers want to get involved straight away. Students are often only resident in their University city for 2/3 months at a time, so it's crucial that enquiries are responded to quickly and that screening procedures are fast and effective.

- **Short and sweet**

Intensive training courses (e.g. a weekend day or 2 evenings) will be much more attractive than lengthy courses.

- **In demand**

There are lots of opportunities on offer at University and students will look to make the most of each semester. For this reason, students will look to change roles regularly and aim to build up a varied CV. Offering flexible roles with opportunities for progression or diversity will be attractive.

Voluntary roles should offer something different to paid opportunities, be flexible and quick to access.

3. Benefits of Volunteering

- Develop skills / experience / personal attributes / self-awareness
- Enjoyment / satisfaction
- Meet like minded people / develop new social circle
- Increase awareness of workplace / UK culture
- Free training / qualifications
- Enhance CV / test out future career plans
- Proven work experience, relevant for all occupations
- No experience needed – training provided
- Out of pocket expenses covered
- Feel part of local community / own neighbourhood
- Network / valuable contacts (e.g. references, future job opportunities etc)
- Flexible – can revise commitment at anytime / time-out during exams/vacation

PART B – A Model of Volunteering

To be successful, a volunteer programme needs to be organised around the needs of the target user group. Having a good range of volunteering roles and a budget for publicity is simply not enough.

The mechanisms by which the programme operates send out powerful messages to students about the institution's attitudes towards volunteering and the value it places on personal development, active citizenship and the needs of the local community.

1. Location

A stand alone location (e.g. office on the high street or main campus) might provide good advertising space but it probably will be costly and if students have to make a special effort to visit, it won't necessarily generate sufficient interest to warrant the investment.

Multipurpose

If volunteers need to visit an office during the course of their volunteering (e.g. to register or collect expenses etc) then a location which has a number of uses to students will be an invaluable asset. This could be an office contained within an area that is used regularly (e.g. withdraw cash, buy lunch, visit gym etc) or even better, located within a relevant service (i.e. Careers Service or Student Union Activities Department).

Size

When choosing the location, consideration should be first given to both the minimum number of enquiries the project aims to generate and the maximum it can support. Once this is established, a suitable location should be identified which offers flexibility and room for growth too.

Accessible

If possible the space should be light, open plan and comfortably furnished, so that people feel encouraged to wander in and browse information. Features such as solid office doors, steps up to an entrance or windows covered in posters can make a location seem less friendly to someone new and can be physical barriers to students with disabilities. A private space for conversations of a sensitive nature may be a particularly important factor for this group of students and others whose personal situation warrants additional support or further discussion (e.g. criminal record).

Layout

The design and layout of the office should be planned with respect to the needs of all the users but particularly cater for those who use it less often, such as student enquirers. There should be a welcome space (e.g. for students to wait, read information and fill in forms etc) as well as meeting or work space for committee or project leaders. Small details make a huge difference to how people feel when they visit (e.g. workstations can be organised so that staff face toward incoming visitors and can welcome / notice people waiting, floor space can be kept clear and clutter free etc).

2. Opening hours

A number of factors are relevant here such as the lifestyles and needs of the target audience as well as staffing, building opening times and running costs. Clearly a balanced approach is needed but the target audiences' needs must be considered first and then a decision taken on how best to meet these within the limits of available resources.

Going online

As with supermarkets and banks – students now expect to be able to access information at any time of day. An online information service may be a good investment over the long term as it will enable your organisation to offer information 'out of hours' without incurring staffing costs.

However, a personal interface (e.g. interview, training or screening) will most likely be needed at some point in the application process and consideration needs to be given to how systems interact so that time is saved for everyone involved work isn't duplicated and resources are appropriately allocated.

Room for individuals

The target audiences' needs vary and choice is the key.

Some students may prefer to speak to someone in person and the office will therefore need to be open to facilitate this. Others may favour using an online system to request information without personal contact. Some students will use both systems in order to feel able to make an informed decision before committing to a project.

Drop-in or by appointment

A drop-in style service during office hours (e.g. 10am to 5pm on weekdays or similar) will provide optimum access for volunteers, particularly if used in combination with an online service for out of hours enquirers.

When setting up a drop-in service, consideration needs to be given to flexible working hours for staff, access to quiet working space for particular tasks or periods and a system for sharing core duties (e.g. dealing with enquirers, processing CRB Disclosures etc).

Appointment systems or group induction sessions may be a viable alternative but can be resource intensive to co-ordinate.

As a rule of thumb, the simpler the system the better. If opening times are confusing or inconsistent this will reflect badly on the service and deter potential volunteers. Having decided to give up their time to volunteer, people will expect to be able to see someone on a first visit. Additional staffing may be required at peak times so that waiting times are kept to a minimum.

3. First contact

As with any service, it's important that the first contact with the user is a positive one. Clearly, students who are giving up their time to help out in their local community will expect to be appreciated and have a warm, friendly welcome when dealing with people in the office – whether via email or in person.

Waiting times

Office systems are an important measure of the values and principles of an organisation. For example, when setting up systems, it might be a good idea to set goals with regard to the average time a student waits to be seen or receive a reply to an email.

If enquiries are dealt with promptly, the student will be encouraged and will also feel that the time that they are offering is both needed and wanted. This will improve retention rates and encourage repeat business.

Workplace culture

In addition to having agreed procedure on what action to take when dealing with enquiries, it might also be a good idea to issue guidelines to staff or committee members on appropriate behaviour or language.

Guidance on other related issues (e.g. data protection or confidential working) will also be effective in creating an environment where people feel comfortable.

Workplace practices

Obviously, for managers the best way to achieve this is to lead by example and spend time in developing a positive workplace environment and culture.

For those who work in the space regularly, it can be easy to develop an exclusive culture or downbeat attitude which will be off putting for students who use the office to do their voluntary work or to register for a project.

Practices such as sharing workstations (e.g. hot desking) or encouraging shared ownership (e.g. involving everyone in the development of projects) can break down barriers and encourage good relationships.

1 . Presentation of information

An information system should support prospective volunteers to be able to make informed decisions about the type of volunteering that they want to do. It should also make the process quick and easy too.

Benchmarking

A good way to achieve all of these elements is by establishing a benchmarking system. The basis of the system should be checklist of minimum standards (e.g. support, training, expenses etc) and practical information (e.g. times, location, travel directions etc) which can be used to assess each volunteering opportunity.

Working contracts

When working with other organisations (e.g. charities or voluntary groups) this information can also be used to form the basis of a working contract with regard to how and to what standard volunteer opportunities are delivered.

Opportunity profiles

Data gathered can also be turned into a standard profile or information sheet for prospective volunteers. In terms of style, information should be presented in a clear and simple format which also has a standardised visible identity. An example is included in the appendices.

The benefits of a benchmarking system are multi fold. Office staff can use the information to assess the opportunity prior to advertising and thus fulfil the institution's obligations to it's membership with regard to health and safety.

Quality standards

The same system can be applied to in-house opportunities (i.e. student led projects etc) as well as other opportunities (i.e. those provided by charities or voluntary groups).

This means that an organisation can ensure that office staff, student project leaders and host organisations each work to minimum quality standards. If difficulties arise, it is useful to have a set of standards so that complaints can be dealt with effectively.

If volunteers are made aware of quality standards, they will know what to expect from their volunteering and feel encouraged to make a commitment. They will also benefit through using the information to compare opportunities on a like for like basis and choose the best option for them.

5. Portfolio of opportunities

In building up a portfolio of opportunities there are many different considerations. Some of these factors will need to be resolved at the outset, others might be developed over time through trial and error.

The most important thing to remember is that it is the portfolio of opportunities itself which will make the project successful. A good product sells itself.

Offer choice

The programme should offer as much variety and choice to student volunteers as possible. Consideration should be given to every element of the programme.

Examples might include :

- time of day
- day of the week
- location
- type of role / task, level of responsibility
- end user / sector
- length of commitment
- how long a volunteer might wait before starting

Other issues, particularly for students with disabilities, can include flexibility (e.g. job share, being able to change time / day volunteer etc) and level of support available.

Breadth and depth

As a minimum, a programme should offer 2 or 3 different choices in each category of role/area of interest (e.g. conservation, teaching etc).

For example, a homework club which is close to campus might be overwhelmed with applications, so it is useful to have alternative projects in different locations or which operate at different times of the day or week.

This way, office staff will be able to fulfil expectations all year round and interested students will be able to find the best match for them.

Multiple entry routes

Ideally, there should also be multiple rounds of recruitment and training, so that students can access popular opportunities at different times of the year.

Target audience

The programme should be designed to cater for the student population of your University. This might sound obvious but it can be difficult balancing the needs of different members.

For example, student parents or PhD students may have very different time or personal commitments to undergraduate students but possibly may know the city better and thus be more willing to travel or be more interested in becoming involved in communities outside of the student campus.

Involve students

It is also important to involve students in the planning of the programme.

This will help you to set reasonable limits and build grass roots support. An example is how to decide which kinds of voluntary activity will be supported (i.e. flyering or admin work might be voluntary role within a charity but students often do this kind of work to earn money and will expect something different from their volunteering).

Delivery of opportunities

Consideration should also be given to how best to deliver volunteer opportunities.

Options might include supporting student leaders to organise new activities, developing projects in partnership with other organisations or University departments and recruiting students for existing or new activities within charities and voluntary groups.

Obviously, there will be different resource implications in each case and this should also be taken into account when planning the programme.

Purpose and ethos

Consideration should also be given to the purpose and ethos of the volunteering programme. Will it be designed to meet local community need first and foremost or to address institutional issues such as widening participation?

Will it aim to provide for students personal and career development or primarily cater for students social and leisure needs?

Clearly, most programmes will have multiple objectives but it may be useful to decide the emphasis which is to be placed on each objective and how this might affect resource allocation.

6. Administrative systems

When creating systems, it's important to keep in mind the needs of the end user.

Forms and other documents

Application forms should be simple and concise. Accompanying documents, such as guidance notes, should be kept short and only used where really necessary.

As an added bonus, short forms (i.e. single sided) mean that photocopying or printing costs can be kept down too.

Similarly, reference requests will be returned more quickly if the format is concise and there are multiple ways to return (e.g. post, fax or email).

Application routes

Where possible and appropriate, it is a good to have a single application system for several volunteer opportunities with a similar focus / level of responsibility and thus enable experienced volunteers to take on additional roles with the minimum amount of fuss.

One stop shop

If possible, offer different options for students to register and make it easy for people to get involved (e.g. at a workshop, in the office or online). An effective system will allow people to register for a project in a single visit.

To facilitate quick registrations and make the best possible use of available staff time, offer time saving tips on recruitment materials (e.g. what to bring in for a CRB Disclosure).

Prepare sign up sheets, handouts and other materials in advance of recruitment so that these can be distributed on first contact.

Time and money can also be saved if documents such as training handouts or job specifications are emailed or available to download online.

Useful milestones

In creating an administrative system, think about what checks and balances might be need to be in place during the course of processing a volunteer application.

You need to decide how you will ensure the process remains straightforward for the user, easy for the organisation to resource but also robust in terms of client or volunteer safety.

Examples might include satisfactory completion of training or receiving a CRB Disclosure before a student starts their volunteering and therefore, giving out placement details at a suitable juncture without creating extra work for yourself (e.g. at the end of the training rather than at the point of registration).

7. Recruitment publicity

Research target market

In planning a recruitment campaign it is essential to know your target market. You need to research who you want to attract, what they are looking for and decide how promotional materials will reflect this.

Think about the promotion of the overall programme as well as specific events and activities and how these different promotional strands might be linked together.

Brand identity

It's a good idea to establish a brand identity at the outset and give staff / volunteers guidance on how these should be used in standard communications (i.e. letters, emails etc) as well as promotional campaigns (e.g. banners, posters, flyers etc).

Canvas opinion

When deciding on a name, logo or a strap line (i.e. promotional slogan) come up with a few alternatives and try to canvas opinion from different people (e.g. staff, volunteers as well as students who are not already involved in voluntary work). If there is a marketing department or relevant student society in your institution, don't forget to use their expertise too.

Keep it simple

Also, the downside of using a complicated logo or a slick acronym is that they can confuse or alienate some audiences (e.g. people with visual impairment or speakers of other languages). Try to avoid using slang or colloquiums too, as these are often culturally specific.

Stick to clear and simple concepts wherever possible. If you are trying to attract different audiences, create different posters or flyers with a standard visual identity rather than trying to make one piece of literature appeal to everyone. Use images and key words or phrases to create high impact posters and literature. Try to include the absolute minimum amount of information and direct people to a web page for further information.

Cultural concepts

Remember that the concept of 'volunteering' has different connotations for different communities and cultures. It might prove more effective to use other common concepts to interest people (e.g. get the most out of your spare time, make friends etc).

Media channels

Consider how to make the best use of all the promotional media available to you. These might include emails and texts (individual or network distribution lists), newsletters, newspapers or magazines, websites, posters/flyers (handed out in person, emailed as a e-flyer or included in University mailings), adverts (e.g. in lectures, film screenings), radio interviews and stands or stalls at events.

By far the single most effective communication tool is also the cheapest – word of mouth. You can use this to your advantage by generating stories in printed media or involving interested students in your promotional campaign.

8. Volunteer fairs

New people are looking for easy routes into finding out what is on offer and may be anxious about being pressured or guilt tripped into making a commitment.

As a first point of contact, remote entry routes such as promotional events, such as volunteer fairs or online information systems offer a comfort zone and a chance for someone to shop around a little or take time to think it through.

Prospective volunteers will be more likely to browse information at a general event where various opportunities are promoted, than to visit a stand alone information stall or come into the office.

Other benefits include good PR / publicity within the local community. In hosting an event such as a Volunteer Fair, the institution is seen to encourage active citizenship and use its' resources to benefit local people.

Set up

Recruitment events are also good way to generate and deal with, interest from students on a large scale.

You need to decide how many students you aim to attract, what will entice them to visit and how, if at all, the limitations of the venue (e.g. layout, size, location etc) might impact on the event.

Get the offer right

Think about the overall image of volunteering that you want to portray to interested students. ◻ immicks and freebies are an obvious way to get people through the doors but won't necessarily mean that you will get more people volunteering at the end of the day.

Hiring a good, central location in a busy space with passing trade may well prove a better investment.

Variety is the spice

In general, the more volunteer opportunities there are available, the higher the attendance will be.

Consider offering stands to local charities and voluntary groups who would like to recruit students as well as student clubs or societies (e.g. amnesty etc) and university departments (e.g. careers service).

Collate evidence

It may be worth having a system to count footfall (i.e. number of visitors through the doors) so that this information can be used in press releases or sponsorship proposals.

Photos and video will also be useful for publicity materials in the future too.

9. Training

If they are prepared for their duties and supported whilst doing them, student volunteers will get more out of their volunteering and are also more likely to fulfil their commitment.

As an institution, you also have a legal duty of care to safeguard the health and well being of the students involved in your programme.

Standards

Insurers will usually offer basic guidance and advise you on the minimum safeguards which should be in place in order to manage the risk.

However, the ideal scenario is to aim to provide sufficient training and support to enable a volunteer to excel at their duties. This way you will cover basic legal requirements and fully satisfy the needs of the volunteers too.

Training as an investment

If this all sounds expensive, then remember that the money spent is also an investment in PR / publicity too.

This is because effective volunteers who are satisfied with their experience will be more likely to generate good PR / feedback from the end user and be able to recruit friends to get involved too.

Content

When putting together a programme you need to address all the issues highlighted by the risk assessment for the activity and also cover questions or concerns that volunteers will bring to the work.

As a rough guide, a training programme should assess and progress individual understanding of the topic area, develop the skill or knowledge required to fulfil the duties and familiarise the trainee with working policy and procedure.

Length and timing

You need to decide what elements of the training are compulsory and how you will manage this.

Many students will have full time study or other personal commitments so a series of short sessions in lunchtimes, evenings or weekends may be better attended than full or half day courses.

Ideally, for programmes with large numbers involved, there should also be more than one event on offer too, so that a wide range of students with different lifestyles can access popular opportunities.

Learning styles

Training materials should take into account different learning styles and life experiences.

Some student volunteers will have a lot of academic learning but less life experience, so it's important to provide the theory as well as scope for skills development and confidence building too.

Core elements

When developing a training programme, it is useful to view individual sessions as building blocks and aim to design these together so that they complement one another.

By developing a 'menu of training opportunities', basic preparation for different roles/tasks can be completed by putting together core sessions to form a course and where required, 'top up' training offered.

For example, basic requirements (e.g. child protection) can be organised separately. For volunteers, this means that specific courses (e.g. schools tutoring or event management) can be kept shorter / be more focused.

It also means that the resources within the organisation are used to best effect because training sessions can be used to benefit more than one group of volunteers and thus involve larger numbers or help the participants to apply the knowledge in different working contexts.

10. Support

The level and type of support required will depend on the task / role as well as the individual needs of the volunteer. Once again, it is useful to have a minimum standard which applies to all volunteer opportunities.

Clarify from the start

It is also a good idea to advertise what support is available so that the volunteer knows what they can expect before they make a commitment.

It might also be appropriate for some activities (e.g. lone working roles, supervisory roles etc) to make participation in whatever support is provided (e.g. meetings etc) mandatory and include this additional time commitment in working contract with the volunteer.

Options might include :

- supervision or project reviews (formal)
- group support meetings (informal)
- regular email or phone contact
- buddying or peer support
- socials
- supervisor being available to listen / mentor by arrangement or as required

Prepare volunteers

To get the most out of the support offered, a volunteer will need to reflect on and review their own personal needs. Organisations can help to facilitate this by asking students to complete feedback sheets or keep records of their volunteering.

Find out what personal development resources are already available to students through your careers service (e.g. work experience portfolios etc).

Flexibility

Obviously, support is a very personal requirement. For this reason, it might be necessary to be flexible about how support is provided or even who provides it.

This is particularly relevant to students with disabilities or whose personal circumstances warrant extra support. Clearly, individual needs develop over time and personal needs also change according to circumstances so support packages need to be reviewed and updated regularly.

11. Monitoring and evaluation

It is good practice monitor and review all aspects of a service on a regular basis. To make it easier, the exercise can often be combined with other tasks such as updating records or collating data for funders or management.

Purpose

Before you design an evaluation or monitoring exercise, it is important to decide why you need the information, plan for how the information will be used afterward, what kinds of outcomes will be communicated to stakeholders and what resources you have available to act on suggestions.

This will help to ensure you the exercise is realistic and achievable.

Who will be involved

Think about which stakeholders should be asked for feedback. Stakeholders might include volunteers, representatives of host organisations, clients and / or their carers, supervisors or project leaders and office staff.

Each will have different contributions to make and may require a different format (e.g. meeting, feedback form etc). However, feedback will be most useful to you if questions and topic areas can be standardised as much as possible throughout the whole exercise.

Formats

The type of monitoring required will depend on the degree of involvement that the person / organisation has within the programme as well as practical constraints (e.g. time or resources available).

Options might include :

- open meetings or focus groups
- phone or e-surveys
- written evaluations or reports
- feedback forms
- project reviews

12. Recognition and celebrations

There are lots of ways to offer recognition to volunteers for the work that they have done. Options can include :

- thank you cards, letter or emails
- photos or other personal mementos
- personal references
- certificates
- branded items (e.g. pens, clothing etc)
- socials
- award ceremonies

Of course, celebratory events can also be used as a vehicle to generate publicity for other reasons (e.g. attracting funding, local media coverage, raising awareness in community or within institution). High profile speakers (e.g. Vice Chancellor) will really add value to the event and raise the profile of volunteering both in the eyes of participants and others outside of the programme.

When planning events it is important to have a clear focus and purpose to the event. It may be more appropriate to hold a formal and informal end of year celebration so that everyone's needs are met.

PART C – Types of volunteering

This list is by no means exhaustive. The key is to offer a wide variety of roles and tasks throughout the year. Visit www.do-it.org.uk or www.studentvol.org.uk for more examples.

Advocacy After school Clubs Animal Welfare Adult Learning	Languages Life Skills Literacy/Numeracy	Youth Work
Befriending	Mediation Mental Health Mentoring Minibus Driving Marketing	
Classroom Support Citizens Advice Bureau Criminal Justice Charity Shops Campaigns	Nurseries / Playgroups	
Drugs Awareness Disability Support Drop-in Centres	One-Off Events Outdoor Pursuits	
Elderly Visiting Event Management	Publicity/PR Playschemes	
Fundraising Family Support First Aid	Refugees/Asylum Seekers Respite + Day Care	
Gardening/DIY	Sport Special Needs	
Health/Fitness Homelessness Homework Clubs Hospitals	Teaching English	
Information Technology	Urban Regeneration	
Kids Outings	Victim Support Victim / Offenders Video / Photography	
	Wildlife / Conservation	
	Young Carers Youth Offending	

PART D – Links with Community Organisations

Voluntary Action Bureaux

Most large towns or cities will have a Voluntary Action organisation which provides for the needs of the local voluntary sector by offering training, resources or promotion and will provide a list of charities or voluntary groups that would like to recruit volunteers.

Funding Advice Bureaux

There are also Funding Advice organisations in many areas too. These will have an awareness of groups which may be interested in developing working partnerships.

Local Voluntary Sector Networks

Another good source of contacts will be public and voluntary sector networks (e.g. housing associations, advice bureaux etc). Each network will have their own media (e.g. email distribution list, web space, meetings or publications).

Statutory Organisations

Statutory organisations such as hospitals, residential homes and schools may also be interested in hosting volunteers or using a service co-ordinated by students. Another good source of local knowledge are council 'area panels' and neighbourhood forums.

Faith and Religious Groups

Organisations such as faith and religious groups often co-ordinate outreach activities (e.g. soup kitchen etc) as will interest groups (e.g. campaigning organisations etc).

University links

University and Union of Students' departments may already have links with community organisations that could be further developed (e.g. host organisations for placements etc).

Some departments will also have specific objectives (e.g. widening participation etc) which might enable you to develop partnership projects.

The key is to research the needs in the local community, identify a range of possibilities and find the 'best fit' between what students will volunteer to do and what organisations want.

PART E – Recognised Best Practice Models

For three consecutive years now, SheffieldVolunteering has been recognised by HEFCE and CRAC as a model of best practice and has been selected to be an exemplar at the national Higher Education Active Community Fund (or HEACF) Volunteering Awards.

The following models of best practice are included here :

1. 2005, Coping with the Unexpected. Can you have too many volunteers?!
2. 2004, SheffieldVolunteering Hub
3. 2003, A blueprint for sustainable volunteering

Visit www.heacf-awards.ac.uk/guide for the full archive of best practice case studies from HEI's across England.

2005, Best Practice Case Study : University of Sheffield Coping with the Unexpected. Can you have too many volunteers?!

Project Overview

The launch of the Higher Education Active Community Fund radically transformed volunteering at the University of Sheffield Union of Students.

Prior to the programme expansion in 2002, the existing project (Student Community Action or SCA) attracted around 350 enquiries annually from students.

It was anticipated that the new programme (incorporating SCA) would attract between 500 and 600 enquiries each year. Staff resources were planned accordingly.

However, by the third year of activity, the same staff team were enabling over 1100 students and staff to become involved in the local community annually.

By early 2005, it became clear that the staff team could not continue to operate at such a pace and an organisational review was launched with the aim of deciding on the future of the programme.

Two things were clear. The institution could not make additional resources available. The staff were committed to maintaining levels of activity.

The challenge facing the team was how to re-organise working practices to make the best use of the resources available and be better able to meet the volume of demand.

Below is a summary of how the team reviewed its administrative, recruitment and promotional structures to enable the project to double in size without any additional resources.

Project Detail

Each aspect of the programme was discussed and considered. This is a summary of some of the main findings and the simple solutions that were found.

Enquiry levels

The office is in a prime location in the heart of the Union of Students. The working space is shared with the Student Activities team (who oversee a portfolio of societies, committees and sport clubs as well as the 'give it a go!' programme of one-off activities).

The open-plan office layout and drop-in service means that enquiry 'traffic' comes in and out all day long. At peak times, it is usual for the whole volunteering staff team to be involved in dealing with enquiries for most of the day, just to be able to keep up with demand.

This is difficult for staff - who have other tasks to do (e.g. co-ordinating training, fundraising etc) and cannot set aside sufficient time in the day to complete them.

The first changes focused on reducing the time that volunteers needed to be in office. For example, application forms were shortened which made them quicker to complete – a popular move with staff responsible for data entry and busy prospective volunteers.

Secondly, administrative procedures were re-focused. For example, as the programme is always oversubscribed staff no longer keep records of or chase up students who only get as far as an initial discussion. Resources are now concentrated on those who make a firm commitment and complete registration.

Thirdly, the number of reasons for visiting the office were reduced. For example, certificates are printed in advance and given out at events so that volunteers do not have to make an extra trip into the office.

Promotions

The recruitment strategy was also re-devised to address the spiralling levels of enquiry.

Using a 'generic email' on promotional literature was found to make the project look accessible but ultimately, was wasting time for staff or volunteers alike. Filtering email traffic had become an almost impossible task to do satisfactorily because enquiries were about all sorts of activities and from people at very different points in the decision making process.

Often email enquiries tended to be vague and usually needed the enquirer to provide the staff team with more information about what they want to do – often exchanging 2 or 3 emails in the process.

To address this problem, it was decided to launch an online information system where students could browse for information on a local charity, request the information they required and then receive it via email.

An automated reply was also set up in response to the generic email which thanked people for their interest and ask them to either apply for specific information online or visit us in the office.

The number of types of printed literature was reduced. Email / telephone details were removed to discourage speculative enquiries and the 'offer' redesigned (i.e. instead of being asked to send back a postcard to 'register interest' with the expectation of follow up contact from the team, readers were asked to visit the website and decide whether to visit the office in person or order online).

The result was that visitors to the office were better prepared and significantly further along in the decision making process (which sped things up for the team).

Also, because the online enquiries were very specific they could be dealt with more quickly and also delegated to temporary staff with less confidence or experience thus reducing the pressure on key staff.

This online system also had the added bonus of making the programme accessible to busy University staff who were also interested in volunteering or students whose personal needs or life commitments made it difficult to get onto campus.

Staffing

At the start of the review, it seemed impossible that levels of activity could be sustained without funding for an extra full time staff member. In fact, after a review of roles and responsibilities it became clear that the volume of particular tasks, such as basic enquiries, CRB Disclosures etc within a specific time period was what the team were finding overwhelming.

The solution appeared to be to increase staffing capacity on a temporary basis. Now, in peak periods (i.e. first 7 weeks of each semester), the team are supported by temporary staff (usually recruited from the student volunteer population) during the busiest times of the day (i.e. lunchtimes) and at times when permanent staff are working out of the office (i.e. delivering training etc).

This solution proved simple and the small increase in staffing costs was covered by a rationalisation of other budget areas (e.g. reducing outgoings on printed literature etc).

Hints and Tips

1. Be open minded and review regularly – what works at the beginning of a new project, might be the very thing that holds you back in the long term.
2. Remember that systems and work practices should always be customer focused as well as user friendly for those who oversee them.

200 , Best Practice Case Study : University of Sheffield SheffieldVolunteering Hub

Context

The launch of the Higher Education Active Community Fund captured the imagination of staff and students across the University of Sheffield. Under HEACF Round1, three new initiatives were created.

All three were based on different specialist knowledge and from practical necessity, were developed and co-ordinated separately. The providers were SheffieldVolunteering (based at the Union of Students) and two different academic departments.

As the work progressed, opportunities arose to work more closely together and a needs analysis of the three initiatives identified strategies for making better use of available resources and expertise.

It was agreed that in addition to organising its own volunteer opportunities, SheffieldVolunteering would provide support services to the two departments who also co-ordinated HEACF activities. Examples included the development of resources (e.g. application forms), recruitment activities, volunteer screening and an end-of-year PR/showcase event.

In recognition of this work, the University and the Union of Students have formed what is believed to be a unique partnership in order to provide a single administration to support the development of volunteering initiatives throughout both institutions.

The model is now known as 'the Hub' and brings together proven expertise in managing volunteering initiatives at SheffieldVolunteering and specialist knowledge within individual academic departments. In the past twelve months, four departments have used the services of SheffieldVolunteering to enable them to provide volunteering opportunities.

The model is simple and effective. It is anticipated that it will enable the University to generate new volunteering opportunities in departments. If replicated elsewhere, it could transform the way staff and student volunteering is organised in HEIs across England.

Programme detail

Departments can choose from a 'pick and mix' menu of support services. This means that support is individually tailored to meet departmental needs.

- **Consultancy:** If new project managers are supported to implement their ideas (e.g. source specialist advice/training, etc) they are more likely to be successful in their efforts.
- **Resources:** If standardised resources (e.g. volunteer application forms, policies, etc) are made available to use or adapt, then new initiatives can be developed quickly and efficiently.
- **Recruitment:** If more than one opportunity is profiled, recruitment activities can attract a wider audience, offer the volunteer choice and be made more cost effective.
- **Screening:** Centralised screening means that records (e.g. personal details, references etc) can be taken up once for each student - making it simpler for them to get involved in more than one activity.
- **Training:** Provision of basic training to all volunteers (e.g. child protection) means that standards can be maintained and properly evaluated.
- **Monitoring:** Data collection (e.g. equal opportunities monitoring) is made more effective if a standard format is applied and used to build up an institutional profile.
- **Evaluation:** Institutional standards for quality can be set and monitored across all programmes.
- **Administration:** Regular tasks (e.g. printing of certificates) are most cost effective if done in bulk.
- **PR/recognition:** End of year celebrations/annual reports can be organised to reflect volunteering achievements across the institution.

The benefits of providing a centralised support service include:

- **Best practice:** the centralisation of systems provides an opportunity to enhance the work of the institution through the promotion of best practice.
- **A proactive approach to community engagement:** The model enables an organisation to harness its resources to maximum effect in the community. It enables a University to encourage and proactively support academic staff who are eager to use their expertise to benefit the local community and at the same time enhance the learning opportunities provided to students and staff.
- **Removing barriers to engagement:** Individual departments are more likely to choose to provide volunteering opportunities to students and staff, if properly supported. By removing barriers to involvement such as administrative burdens, departmental resources are put under less strain and busy academic staff can concentrate on the development of the volunteer activity.
- **An investment in sustainability:** The establishment of a central support service can help to embed the culture of volunteering within an institution by improving the profile of such activities, by providing a forum for development and most importantly, by ensuring a firm foundation through the rationalisation of the resources required.

- **Customer focused:** Volunteers benefit from being able to take part in more than one activity without having to fill in multiple application forms. The wider community also benefits from having a central point of access to information and recruitment services within the institution.
- **Active citizenship:** Access to a central support service can also be used to enable contributions from individuals as well as departments. This means that individual staff and students who don't have access to other resources can be supported to organise an event or activity which will benefit their local community.
- **Cost effective:** Funding streams should be a catalyst for positive change but can sometimes prove to be a divisive factor in institutions if departments are in competition for the same resources. This piece of collaborative work is proof that useful and cost- effective solutions can be found.

In addition to obvious cost savings (i.e. administrative personnel only need to be employed by the central department), there are further savings to be made if the duplication of work across the institution is minimised.

Hints and tips

- Stay customer focused. A centralised service shouldn't make it more complicated for departments or volunteers.
- Complete an inventory of skills/expertise in your team and then make realistic decisions about which services to offer.
- Decide which services need to be standardised so that you can set institutional targets (e.g. equal opportunities monitoring) and which can be adapted so that departments can use the service in a way that suits them (e.g. screening procedures).
- Create generic resources (e.g. forms, protocols) in universal formats which can easily be adapted.
- Draw up service contracts so that arrangements are clear and resources can be allocated to the work.
- Organise your own programme so that it is a fully accessible resource. For example, training topics can be delivered separately so that departments can build their own programme from the options available.

2003, Best Practice Case Study : University of Sheffield

A blueprint for sustainable volunteering

Broad overview

A grant from the Higher Education Active Community Fund has enabled us to transform student volunteering at the University of Sheffield Union of Students.

We launched SheffieldVolunteering in October 2002. In the first eight months, we attracted over 920 students, all eager to find out about volunteering.

That's almost 5% of our full time student population and represents an incredible four fold increase in the number of enquiries.

To meet demand, we created almost 400 brand new volunteer placements. These have included: 7 new initiatives in partnership with 15 schools, the 'Just Do It' event involving teams of students completing one- off challenges for 9 voluntary organisations and a mentoring service developed for 8 to 11 year old youngsters.

In addition, we've also involved unprecedented numbers of student volunteers in 50 local charities and voluntary groups. Students have helped to provide vital services for ordinary people of all ages and from all walks of life; children & young people, people with learning disabilities, refugees & asylum seekers, the homeless or the elderly have benefited.

In a well documented climate of student apathy and declining volunteer numbers, it's been refreshing to be able to tell a different story.

Our achievements

New volunteering model

We created a unique menu of 'pick and mix' volunteer options. Our action packed programme of one day, short and medium term options was designed so that there were opportunities to participate in all year round. This enabled us to involve new students in volunteering quickly and keep volunteers involved in their community throughout the year.

Promoting citizenship

One year on, we have proven that our volunteering model works. Just three weeks into the new term, 1 in 5 of the students who volunteered in a new SheffieldVolunteering initiative last year have requested further voluntary work placement.

Local & national recognition

Our project has received national recognition (see feature in [Guardian – Higher Education](#)) as well as high praise from Sheffield schools, charities and local community forums (see Annual Review).

Volunteering for all students

The HEACF grant enabled us to capitalise on a largely untapped market for volunteering. Our previous volunteer profile was almost totally female with 18-21 year old home students from the Arts, Law and Social Science disciplines featuring predominantly.

Its now radically different with an excellent cross section of faculties and year groups as well as marked improvement in representation of male students (22%), mature students (2%) and international students (10%).

Hints and tips

1. Do your research

We designed and then refined the programme over a 6 month period in preparation for an official launch at the beginning of the new term.

Our two-stage process of design and testing, enabled us try out our ideas on prospective student volunteers, local organisations and members of the community. In this way we were able to plan a robust programme and be confident about its delivery.

2. Know your market

In deciding our new volunteer roles, we used a tough selection criteria. We decided our opportunities had to offer something quintessentially different to other available volunteer roles. This was important in terms of enabling us to attract students and build on (but not compete with) the local voluntary sector provision.

With this in mind, we decided to concentrate on developing volunteering opportunities which capitalised on the unique profile of our student body (e.g. languages spoken or area of study). In addition, we ruled out tasks that students could be paid for (e.g. administration, marshalling, flyering or shop work).

Our final selection criteria was simple : the opportunity must be fulfil the developmental needs of students whilst at the same time meeting a genuine need in our community.

3. Offer choice

Students were able to select from a wide range of 1 day, 6 week, 3 month or 1 year placements. We offered our range of opportunities all year round and organised multiple rounds of recruitment, training and placements for popular activities.

This approach enabled new students to try volunteering in bite-sized chunks, fit it easily around study or paid work commitments and progress to more responsible or time-intensive roles when they had built up their experience.

4. Be practical

Once we had decided what roles we could create, we looked closely at how best to make our placements both useful and sustainable. The factors we took into consideration included times of day/week, number of hours, travel routes and transport costs.

For example, in our schools initiative our aim was to involve the staff and pupils that most needed volunteer support. We drew up a list of schools in the most deprived wards of our city which also included neighbourhoods where large numbers of student residents had a direct impact on the local community.

We then investigated travel options from popular student neighbourhoods to each of the schools and looked for the quickest and most direct route.

Our final list included a couple of placements within walking distance of student neighbourhoods, lots of placements where regular tram or bus routes took volunteers virtually door-to-door and a few placements where volunteers would need to change bus/tram in town or travel as a group by taxi. This approach helped us to attract and retain volunteers as well as keep our transport costs manageable.

5. Make it personal

With transport times kept to a minimum, we were able to invite schools to decide the amount of time that they needed volunteers within a prescribed range of 1 to 2.5 hours per week.

This meant that individual staff felt involved in the scheme, could better plan for a volunteer's involvement in lessons and be confident about what they would get out of the extra time that they had invested.

When students asked us about our schools initiatives, we asked them to look through the placements folder themselves. This meant that they had ownership of their placement from the start and were able to choose the best role, day, time, and location for them.

This approach has been a critical factor in helping us to retain volunteers, maintain our commitments to staff and establish excellent working relationships with local schools.

APPENDICES – Example Policy Documents

A : Contracting with other organisations – developed with Hallam Volunteering
Application form for charities / voluntary groups wishing to recruit students

B : Child Protection
Working protocol for volunteers

Appendix A :

Application form for charities & voluntary groups wishing to recruit volunteers

SheffieldVolunteering's Recruitment Service

University of Sheffield Union of Students

Name of organisation

Name of volunteer project (if different)

Please give a brief summary of the aims of your organisation

Address of organisation (including postcode)

Telephone number

E-mail address

Please give details of the person(s) responsible for volunteers

Contact name

Position(s) held

Telephone number

Best time to contact

Title of voluntary opportunity and brief description of volunteer role / responsibilities

Address of venue where activity takes place (if different from above)

When do you require volunteers?

Day / Time

(please circle and state time(s) required)

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

How often?

One-off _____
(please give date of event)

Weekly

Fortnightly

Other (please specify)

Minimum commitment :
(please circle)

3 months

6 months

1 year

Other _____

How do you select volunteers?

(tick all relevant boxes)

Application form

Interview

Reference(s)

CRB Disclosure

Other (please give details)

Number of vols required :

Min _____ Max _____

When can new volunteers get involved?

Anytime. We take new applications all year round – subject to space in the project(s).

Fixed intakes. We offer training courses in _____ (please fill in months).

What are you looking for in your volunteer(s)?

Skills

Qualities

Experience

What can a volunteer expect to get out of volunteering with your organisation?

What training do you provide for volunteers?

Type of training

Content

Duration

Are there particular dates that we can promote this year? (e.g. training courses, one-off activities etc)

What support do you provide for volunteers?

Will volunteers work alone or in a group?

What is the ratio of volunteers to clients?

Alone *as a sole volunteer with an individual or group*

In a group *with other volunteers or staff*

Are volunteers appropriately insured? Yes No

i.e. Public Liability and Employers Liability insurance.

Name of Your Insurers:

Date of Policy (Term): Limit (any one loss):

Do you provide out of pocket expenses?

Travel Childcare Other (please specify)

Are you happy to supply the information we need for our funders? Yes No (See 'Terms & Conditions')

Your name

Your signature

Date

Appendix B :

Child Protection - Working protocol for volunteers

As a student volunteer, you will encounter children and young people in a range of situations. Your relationship with these groups will be covered by Child Protection legislation, which seeks to protect the young. This document has been designed to help protect you as well as the young people with whom you'll be working.

As volunteers, you have a duty of care towards the children and adults with whom you work. By Duty of Care, we mean our social and legal obligation to protect the vulnerable, especially in situations where we have power and are seen as a source of authority or support. The University and The Union also have a duty of care towards you. We have an obligation to ensure that you work in safe contexts, understand your responsibilities and enjoy your experience.

As a volunteer we ask that you:

- Treat everyone with equal respect, whether students, staff or children.
- Respect the right of children to privacy.
- Provide a positive role model for the children and be aware that whilst volunteering, you are a representative of the University of Sheffield.
- Praise and endorse desirable behaviour and try to give children positive and equal attention, so that they do not have to seek it through undesirable behaviour.
- Discourage negative attitudes or behaviours (e.g. ridicule, physical bullying, racism, sexism, homophobia) and encourage children to challenge appropriately.
- Make clear through your actions and words that children have a right to respectful and non-violent relations with others.
- Be aware that it is never acceptable to physically punish a child (or threaten to), even in the unlikely event that a child tries to hurt another child or you.

To avoid any misinterpretation of your intentions or actions, you should:

- Avoid any physical contact with children except in the context of games or exercises which belong to the work and are being supervised by the person in charge.
- Plan your activities so that they involve more than one person or take place in the sight and hearing of others.
- ***Ensure that you are NEVER left alone with a child.***
- Never agree to meet or contact a child outside the designated hours or location of the project.
- Not make suggestive remarks, gestures or jokes with a sexual content in the hearing/sight of children.

When children behave in unacceptable ways, you should:

- Make it clear to the child in question, that it is the behaviour and not the child that is unwelcome.
- Bring serious issues to the attention of the person in charge and leave it to them to set sanctions.
- Never shout, raise your voice in a threatening way or other use techniques which are intended to single out or humiliate children.
- Only ever physically restrain a child in order to prevent personal injury to themselves, other children or adults. Any event of this sort should be recorded and the person in charge informed as soon as possible.

It's unlikely, but possible, that you could face one of the following situations:

- You suspect that a child or young person is being abused.
- A child or young person tells you that someone is abusing her or him.
- You are made aware of an allegation against another adult or against yourself.

Your role is to record what has happened and pass on information. You must not investigate. You must report any suspicion or evidence of abuse to the person in charge immediately.

DECLARATION I have read and agree to abide these regulations.

Name _____ Signed _____ Date _____

****NB. The ONLY volunteer role/task in which you will work alone is a '1:1 mentor' in a secondary school. Only volunteers who have been recruited and trained for this role should undertake lone work with a young person. Mentors must make sure that their supervisor in school knows where/when they are working at all times, where to find support if they need it and ensure that their work takes place in the sight and hearing of others at all times.*