

Parks and Green Spaces: Recruiting and retaining volunteers

This guide draws on best practice to suggest ways to attract and retain a strong volunteer base.

What roles do you need volunteers for?

Many groups are dependent upon volunteers to carry out a range of duties. These may include developing projects, sitting on a board of trustees, raising funds or delivering activities.

Having a diverse mix of people, different ages and perspectives for example, can add considerable value to your work and provide useful insights and experience.

Links to websites have an underline of colour to distinguish them from plain text.

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- Prepare volunteer role descriptions. These should state what activities volunteer can be expected to undertake, how they should go about things, and the support network that they can draw upon whilst involved with the park.
- Prepare a short list of ideal attributes or skills that a typical volunteer undertaking that role may need. Think about including these in any advertising. This will also help you decide what types of people to target when recruiting. Keep this to core skills and explore any training that may be available locally to top up existing experience and knowledge.
- Define the benefits of volunteering at the park. Describe the benefits of being involved in your park. Think about including quotes from an existing volunteer.

- Quantify how much time will be needed to carry out the role. If a role is starting to be time intensive, consider splitting out responsibilities.
- Conduct a skills audit of the volunteers you already have. This will help you identify where your skills gaps are and help you target the right people.

Getting Prepared and Recruitment

- Make sure you have a volunteer policy. Do you already have volunteers? If so, it is likely that you will have a volunteer policy in place. A good policy will set out details of inductions, how volunteers are recruited, how they are managed, and what training is on offer.
- If you don't have a volunteer policy in place, consider developing one before your recruitment exercise. Your local CVS can help you. You can also use a sample policy. Voluntary Action Islington have developed lots of resources through their 'Strengthening Volunteers Project'. These are free to access here: <https://vai.org.uk/services/support-for-groups/strengthening-volunteering-project/>
- Consider your budget and where to advertise to reach your ideal volunteers. Include as much information as possible. People are more likely to apply for a position that they can imagine doing, so good quality, clear information is important.
- Younger volunteers can often be more difficult to find. Research has shown this can partly be due to their perceptions of other volunteers being older. If you have young people involved already ask them to spread the word among their networks.
- Go to where the people you are targeting are. If parents of school age children are one of your target audiences, put some posters up around the school gates or near children's play areas.
- Ask existing volunteers of all types to pass on opportunities to friends, neighbours, and colleagues. Nominate one of the group to provide contact details for an informal chat. Place some accessible information on the website or a facebook group.

Volunteer Induction, Retention and Reward

- You should have an induction pack or handbook for new volunteers. This doesn't need to be lengthy but should include the aims of the organisation,

a clear description of the volunteer role, an orientation sheet (where to find tools, who holds keys, where are the teabags...) and a copy of your volunteer policy. Contact details of who to contact for support are also important.

- The way inductions are carried out will necessarily vary. However, useful techniques include giving a guided tour of the park and some of the background, key points of interest.
- Try to include an introduction to other volunteers. Some groups operate a 'buddy' or 'peer support' system where the volunteer has a dedicated member of the team to shadow, ask questions and generally gain support from. Opportunities to 'learn by doing' alongside others are helpful. These can build solid relationships going forward and can help volunteers feel part of something bigger.
- Try tackling topics such as health and safety with a quiz format and provide scenarios or examples where possible.
- Our experience has shown that volunteers often become demotivated if there is a lack of clarity about what they should be doing or if decision making processes are unclear.
- Try to ensure that processes are in good shape and meetings and relationships are healthy. This will help new volunteers gain a positive experience.
- If you find that certain groups are underrepresented, ask what you can do to make it easier for those to attend. For example, working age adults may not be able to attend meetings or give time during their working hours.
- Finally, reward volunteers with recognition of their achievements. Log hours given, and key successes and celebrate and share these internally and externally. Providing social opportunities to get together outside of working time to keep motivation levels high can help too.

Sample Volunteer Induction Checklist

Documents	Received (initial & date)
Orientation checklist	
Summary of activities of the organisation & structure chart	
Volunteer Policy or Handbook	
Health and Safety information	
A copy of CC3 The Essential Trustee (for charity trustees only)	
Next of kin contact details	
A volunteer agreement including role description	
A volunteer plan (to record goals and achievements)	

Further Reading

In January 2019 NCVO published a report called 'Time Well Spent' on the volunteer experience. This national survey of over 10,000 respondents found there are eight features that make up a quality experience for volunteers:

- Inclusive, welcoming and accessible to all;
- Flexible, takes into account people's individual life circumstances;
- Impactful, makes a positive difference;
- Connected, gives a sense of connection to others, to the cause and/or an organisation;

- Balanced, does not overburden with unnecessary processes;
- Enjoyable, people feel good about what they are doing;
- Voluntary, the person has freely chosen to do it;
- Meaningful, resonates with volunteers' lives, interests and priorities.

The full report is available here:

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/policy-and-research/volunteering-policy/research/time-well-spent>

- Quality Framework and Safeguarding
- For more information on good practice methods for recruiting volunteers you can download the Investing in Volunteer Quality Standard Framework
- <https://iiv.investinginvolunteers.org.uk/>
- It's also important to take into account safeguarding during the recruitment and volunteer management process. NCVO have a number of helpful resources, available here:
- <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/steps-to-a-safer-organisation/choosing-staff-volunteers-and-trustees>