

What is it about some organisations that never fail to attract people to volunteer for them?

Is it about the role itself? Is it the causes they support? The people and partners they work with? Their reputation? The answer to this is probably yes. Different people will have their own motivators and drivers that make them want to volunteer.

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) posed the question: What do the Samaritans, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and Doctors of the World all have in common?

Answer: People are queuing up to volunteer for them.

'They're not the only great volunteer-involving organisations. There are thousands of voluntary organisations, large and small, that are wonderfully innovative in creating volunteering roles that win the hearts of volunteers.'

So how exactly are they doing it?

Perhaps it makes good sense to take a look at some of the reasons why people volunteer in the first place and consider how to go about satisfying those needs and delivering on those expectations. From helping the environment or leading a more active lifestyle to feeling valued as part of a team and building social groups, people choose to volunteer for many reasons. And the types of roles they fulfil are just as varied - from gardening and other outdoor activities to match day stewarding, retail assistants, charity fundraisers, mentoring opportunities and support for vulnerable individuals, alongside a whole world of other activities.

Here are 12 ways you can help to inspire and engage your volunteers:

1. Explore creative recruitment methods

Recruitment should feature highly in your thinking and planning when you create a volunteer role.

As with any recruitment campaign, things are incredibly competitive. You'll need to make yours stand out. Get creative on social media, use a variety of striking, visual content, include testimonials, short impactful videos (which needn't be costly) and emotive experiences from existing volunteers to capture imagination and demonstrate the difference they'll be making once they join.

2. Provide excellent induction and training

A good induction ensures volunteers are able to contribute quickly and feel part of the organisation. Induction incorporates orientation, personal introductions, understanding the volunteering role, knowing where to find things and understanding the values and policies of the organisation.

Support comes in many forms and a well-organised induction session can provide volunteers with the support they initially require. Induction should not consist of simply giving volunteers policies to read and introducing them to other volunteers and staff. Getting the induction process right can help your organisation retain its volunteers for longer.

Volunteer induction checklist

- introduce them to other staff and volunteers
- show them around the building
- explain who they can go to if they have any questions or problems
- show them where they will be sitting and where they can find any equipment, they need
- let them know about breaks
- explain how to claim expenses
- explain your organisation's policy on volunteers using telephones or accessing the internet for their own use
- ask them to shadow other experienced volunteers or paid members of staff.

What else will volunteers need to know during induction?

Organisational policies and procedures are better left until volunteers have gone through day-to-day practicalities. Once you have completed the checklist, volunteers should feel more confident about asking you to explain anything they do not fully understand. When you move onto formal matters, ensure volunteers understand the issues by going through policies and procedures with them. These more formal issues could include:

- your organisation's policies and procedures. For example, equal opportunities, safeguarding, health and safety, risk assessments etc.
- the history, ethos and structure of the organisation
- how to deal with complaints and areas of concern
- the role and responsibility and any volunteers agreement.

The volunteer may find it useful if the information they are given is kept in a handbook or pack.

3. Make them feel welcome

Introduce them to employees and other volunteers to help them feel part of things. Have senior leaders drop by to introduce themselves. Show that you're a warm, friendly and approachable organisation.

4. Establish excellent communication

Strong, regular communication motivates volunteers and a lack of it is one of the main reasons they become disillusioned. Ensure they're receiving relevant, tailored information, rather than regurgitating organisation-wide messages that aren't applicable. Deliver those comms using suitable channels that they've confirmed they're happy to use. Be ready to listen and respond to feedback and concerns, particularly when the organisation is experiencing change or the role itself changes.

5. Ensure they have access to the resources they need

The nature of the role is likely to mean that volunteers won't always be working conventional hours or in an office environment with easy access to resources. Make sure they can get hold of the information they need, when they need it - a volunteer's portal or printed materials if necessary, just be sure to make access easy.

6. Introduce variety

Keep things interesting. Consider your volunteers as extra staff who are capable of performing complex tasks that use their experience and skills. Provide leadership opportunities to those who want to shoulder responsibility and guide others. Help them connect with people they may not otherwise interact with. Understand their skills and background - they may be able to do more than you are currently offering them.

7. Provide a named line manager

The line manager is the key to engagement, motivation, and trust because human relationships and interaction matter. Make sure everyone knows who handles their ongoing support, guidance and direction and give them someone specific to talk to and share successes or concerns with.

8. Encourage managers to practice influencing skills

Think about what managers can do to use their powers of influence such as sharing the organisation's strategic vision for volunteering, using a variety of influencing strategies to help you clarify changes you want to bring about and influencing others within the organisation when it comes to valuing your volunteers.

9. Acknowledge contributions

Gratitude is a strong emotion. It can change a person's outlook on just about any situation. Maintain morale by showing gratitude and demonstrating it openly. Don't overlook the power TNTs (Tiny Noticeable Things), those small, simple gestures like taking them to lunch, giving a small gift, or sending a thank you card to their home.

10. Help them to develop new skills

Anyone who is willing to volunteer is likely to have a healthy curiosity and willingness to try new things. Indeed, many volunteers get involved just so they can develop new skills around those topics and issues they feel passionate about. Often simply transitioning from the private sector to the voluntary sector requires a new skill set and volunteers will welcome the opportunity to learn how to work effectively in a different environment.

11. Encourage social connectedness

Keep in mind that many people volunteer because of the social interaction so provide opportunities, both digitally and in person with colleagues, service users and visitors. Help people to feel connected and part of something bigger. Your staff and your volunteers are likely to be the best-informed advocates of your brand and, given the opportunity, have great things to say. It is a win-win situation!

12. Share success stories

Volunteers want to know that they are making a difference. Let them see their work in action through tours and presentations and by inviting them to provide suggestions about how that work can be done even better. Share those stories smartly and creatively with the wider public to spread the word even further and instil pride in your people. Value your volunteers. Reward their dedication. Make the experience positive and enticing enough and they will remain committed, telling others and spreading the word that your organisation is the place to be for the savvy volunteer.