



Retaining Volunteers: Top Tips

Image courtesy of
Men in Sheds
Winslow

Volunteers should be viewed as customers, and given an excellent experience. People's experiences in volunteering will not always be linear, and flexible pathways need to be built in to support them along their volunteering journeys, with the focus being on enabling regular volunteers to volunteer more.

It is imperative to build relationships with volunteers to enable them to move into other roles if they so wish, and to give more time. Even if someone decides that a volunteer role is not for them, or something in their life crops up so that they can no longer volunteer, it is crucial to maintain this relationship and to keep the door open for their return.

Key points:

- Have a written volunteer recruitment process with clearly assigned responsibilities and associated paperwork/templates: and train all staff and volunteers who manage other volunteers
- Draw up a Volunteer Agreement, setting out expectations on both sides, agree with the volunteer, and get both parties to sign NB include wording that this agreement is in honour only, and is not a legally binding contract of employment, and that no employment relationship is intended either now or at any time in the future
- Do not forget to do the obvious: introduce new volunteers to members of staff and other volunteers and trustees – make them feel welcome! Introduce them in the staff newsletter
- Make the experience a good one: put in the “fun” factor if possible, but above all, make it rewarding. Do the unexpected, for example inviting volunteers to the next staff team meeting and thanking them
- Provide volunteers with the necessary training for their roles
- Appreciate volunteers' efforts: thanking them regularly and in a genuine manner; for example: verbally, by email, in organisation newsletters, and at specific events e.g. AGMs, annual conferences, thank you events during Volunteers' Week – this could also be an opportunity for volunteers to invite along friends to see if they might be interested in volunteering. Run an annual Volunteer Awards' event with different categories
- Have regular catch up sessions addressing any issues or concerns, and enable volunteers to shape their roles to fit with their interests or changing life circumstances – thereby putting more control in their hands
- Give each volunteer a named supervisor, and offer the chance to unload: especially if the role is emotionally demanding, for example: with Samaritans or Citizens Advice
- Have regular review sessions (for example every 6 months): understanding volunteers' current motivations and issues, and ensuring that they are given opportunities to give and receive feedback on what they are doing is essential
- Encourage volunteers to complete feedback surveys; these could be anonymised to encourage more frank comments
- Where possible, have a policy of offering to reimburse reasonable expenses, for example travel to and from home and the place of volunteering. Please note that there are strict rules on what expenses should and should not be reimbursed. Further information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/volunteering/pay-and-expenses>
<https://knowhownonprofit.org/people/volunteers/keeping/volunteer-expenses#>



- **Time Credits:** since April 2014, the social enterprise Spice has partnered with Buckinghamshire County Council through its Prevention Matters' programme to offer a Time Credits' programme. People volunteering with organisations that supported elderly or vulnerable adults, or with Active Bucks (supporting more people in Bucks to get active) were able to gain a time credit for each hour volunteered, and use these toward various different activities, for example seeing a play, attending Adult Education Courses, or going on visits to London attractions. Research published in 2017, revealed that the scheme was extremely beneficial for those volunteers who participated:



- **69%** feel more able to contribute to the community and peers
- **64%** feel more confident
- **65%** can afford to do more things
- **71%** report improved quality of life
- **65%** feel more positive about their future
- **56%** feel less isolated and lonely
- **24%** are more physically active
- **11%** report improved mental health.

These findings demonstrate that Time Credits are an excellent method of increasing volunteers' wellbeing, and also retaining them. Although Spice's partnership with the County Council will end in April 2018, the organisation is looking at other ways of continuing to work with community groups and services in Buckinghamshire.

Case studies of how volunteers in Buckinghamshire have benefited from the Time Credits' scheme, can be found here:

<https://tinyurl.com/y7sowx26>

- Do not forget: staff and volunteers who manage other volunteers need support too!
- Do whatever you can to keep volunteers' inspiration alive – problems start when they begin to forget why they decided to volunteer with an organisation in the first place!
- Hold exit meetings: should a volunteer unfortunately decide to move on (for whatever reason), these provide an excellent opportunity to understand more about their reasons for doing so, and to ask their permission to stay in touch in case they decide to volunteer in the future. Any comments they make (positive or negative) can also be fed back into your volunteering programme.

Resources for Volunteer Managers and Co-ordinators

It is important to note that unless the management and co-ordination of volunteers is properly resourced, any volunteer-involving organisation attempting new approaches to attracting and retaining volunteers will be doomed from the outset!

Further resources from Community Impact Bucks, including sample policies, can be found here: <https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/volunteering/we-need-volunteers/>

www.communityimpactbucks.org.uk



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