

Volunteers and your group

You might not actually realize it but if you are involved in a group and are not paid then **you** are actually a volunteer! So when taking on new group helpers and organisers, you are in fact recruiting volunteers, follow these simple rules and you will find that your group will become a more busy and productive one, you might even find that the group organisers work reduces!

Recruiting, managing and keeping Volunteers

Does your group need new volunteers?

Before recruiting them, figure out why you want them, it's not so hard if you need a new Treasurer or Chair but if you need a volunteer to help with a new project or idea then work out what their role will be so that you can clearly convey this in any recruitment process. Also check closer to home, is there someone in the group that has been over looked who would be good at the work, maybe someone is bored of their current role and would like to switch their tasks, in which case you can advertise for someone for their old role and have someone handy to train them in how to do it!

Recruiting new volunteers for your group is a great way to ease workloads, manage new projects, groups or events and introduce new roles. New volunteers can bring with them fresh motivation and enthusiasm which will hopefully rub off onto the rest of the group.

Recruiting Volunteers

Recruiting volunteers however, can often seem daunting especially when you are looking for a specific type of volunteer. Many LGBT groups do not publicise their presence or work widely, some not at all, while this works for them as a group, it can make recruiting new members and volunteers a bit tricky. One way to get around having to disclose every aspect of your group and its membership is to go through a local LGBT community organisation such as The Intercom Trust, who can then signpost anyone in your area that is looking for a group to join or a volunteering opportunity. If your reading this then you have probably already discovered www.lgbtcollective.org.uk – you too could be advertised on the website.

Word of mouth among members is always a good way of letting people know that you are looking for new volunteers but this can mean that you will have a very similar set of group members and volunteers, this however, may be what you want, in which case, go for it. Advertising in local publications and LGBT publications is a good way to let people know about

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what your group do and why you are looking for volunteers. Some of the wider read web publications such as the Pink Paper, Pink News and LGBT Collective may well be happy to include a short piece from your group.

If you do decide to advertise for volunteers, keep the description clear, concise and most importantly, appealing. Try and make the role sound interesting, if it's a role that you're advertising because no one in the group wants it then ask yourselves why! Is there a way of combining the role with part of others roles to make it more varied and interesting?

Managing Volunteers

Managing new and existing volunteers well is one of the secrets to keeping them. If you have recently recruited volunteers you need to offer them all the support and training they need. Some will want to be left to get on with it and will not take you up on offers of support and training past the initial induction but others may feel a little over their heads and will need additional support. This doesn't just apply to large groups that have paid staff to work with volunteers but also to the management committees of local social groups who need to offer one another support in fulfilling their roles to achieve the goals of the group.

All of this shouldn't stop after the volunteering honey moon period is over, support and training should be offered throughout a volunteer's life with a group, otherwise roles get stale and repetitive and people can feel burdened with one particular job that they are left unchallenged by.

Keeping Volunteers

Once you have recruited your volunteers, don't get lazy, you now have to start thinking about retaining them. The process of retaining volunteers actually starts when you recruiting them. If a volunteer feels that the role advertised is not in fact the role they are starting then they won't feel inclined to continue doing it. Likewise, if the role stays the same and becomes routine then volunteers will grow tired of the work quickly. Keep talking to volunteers and finding out what they would like to do with their role and what they hope to get out of it, make sure this is reflected in any changes or add-on's to the role, this can refresh volunteer's enthusiasm and motivation.

Valuing volunteers is very important if you want to keep them, similarly for small community groups, valuing the work that each other do for the group is important so that no one feels like they are being taken for granted.

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Recognising volunteer's contributions and awarding them with training in new skills or interests relevant to their post is a great way to keep volunteers motivated and feeling valued, if their skills are being developed and the group is ultimately benefiting from it then every one's a winner baby. Once you have trained your new volunteer, the last thing you want is for them to leave, try and put a system in place through which you can have open communication with the volunteers so that any barriers or problems preventing them from continuing to volunteer can be discussed and hopefully resolved. However, if a volunteer leaves to move onwards and upwards because of what they have gained through volunteering with your group, then you should be thoroughly happy for them, and thoroughly please with yourselves and you can use it when attracting and recruiting new volunteers.

Above all else, a simple thank you can work wonders for anyone! This includes thanking each other – as part of a community group you don't always recognise each other as volunteers, thank each other for the collective work you all do and it will all seem a little extra worthwhile when your efforts are being recognised!

As mentioned above, it is really important when recruiting volunteers for both your group and the volunteer to be clear about what they are doing; in this respect volunteering is no different to getting a new paid job, except for the obvious! A job description is a good way of doing this and doesn't have to be as formal as it sounds. For smaller community groups, this could simply be a page with bullet points of the duties required from the volunteer, it could be a volunteer agreement which can list the agreed task of the volunteer and the group, a sample agreement is available in this section.

It is important to remember that when taking on volunteers that no contracts - verbal, written or otherwise should be entered into – please seek further advice from your local volunteer bureau on this matter if you are at all unsure when creating a volunteer agreement – it's actually jolly important.

Job descriptions are available for honorary officers such as the chair person, treasurer and secretary on this website.

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