

**Do-it** *Be more*

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How to Do-it

**Why?**

Why you might want to involve  
volunteers in your work

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In this guide we look at **Why?** Your project might want to involve volunteers. **Why?** can seem like a rhetorical question but it's useful to consider both your philosophical position, which we encourage you to have, as well as your strategic approach.

At [Do-it.org](https://www.do-it.org) we believe that:

**'Volunteering can change the world'.**

Which is a big statement.



# Why do you involve volunteers?

When planning for volunteer involvement it is important to think about **Why?** you want to involve volunteers. You may not be looking to change the world but you are likely to be hoping to make a difference. perhaps for the people who use your services, your customers or for the local community.

Whilst 'extending our service provision' or 'adding value' are perfectly valid reasons for involving volunteers, they are hardly inspiring. It is recommended that you have a philosophical basis alongside the practical reasons for involving volunteers.

## Volunteering builds social capital

'Social what now?' We hear you cry. Okay, let's take a step back. The Office for Economic Cooperation and Development defines social capital as: ***"networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups"***.

Or, as the Office for National Statistics states: ***'Greater interaction between people generates a greater sense of community spirit. The main aspects of social capital include citizenship, 'neighbourliness', social networks and civic participation.'*** (1)

(1)  
[www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)

So what we're saying is that volunteering can bring together diverse groups of people who may not have had contact with each other otherwise and this helps to develop awareness, understanding and an increased sense of community.



**There is no such thing as 'just a volunteer'!**

If you think that then you should not be involving them in your work. Remember, every one of the 160,000 registered charities in the UK are governed by volunteers – they are called Trustees. Volunteers can literally handle responsibility at any level, it's just a question of asking the right people with the right skills to do the right thing.



### **The bigger picture**

There is likely to be greater benefit for all those involved if you think about volunteering in terms of its wider contribution to volunteers themselves and society as a whole, as opposed to simply focusing on how your group or organisation will benefit.

# Develop a 'positioning statement'

More clunky language we're afraid but a positioning statement is simply a rationale for volunteer involvement which can be contained within your volunteer policy or strategic plan if you have one. You may have a number of reasons for wanting to involve volunteers which could include:

- ✓ To increase **diversity**
- ✓ To improve and develop **links** with our local community
- ✓ To offer **opportunities** for those who access our services, enabling them to also be providers of our service.
- ✓ To raise our **profile**
- ✓ To **add value** to our service provision by increasing our offer to service users
- ✓ To help us grow our **service provision**
- ✓ To provide progression opportunities for local people
- ✓ The volunteer relationship is often perceived differently by service users and can therefore create a different dynamic
- ✓ Volunteers have **specialist skills** or knowledge that the organisation might otherwise find it difficult to access
- ✓ To allow our community to **influence** both what we do and how we do it
- ✓ To increase **donations** to our services - for many organisations there can be a strong correlation between those who give money and those who give time
- ✓ To provide us with another method of **developing our workforce** - those who gain experience as volunteers may well apply for vacancies and can be well placed for progressing into paid roles
- ✓ To increase understanding of what we do and why we do it

Select those that you feel are most relevant or important, then ensure that your rationale is communicated beyond the team or individual responsible for volunteer involvement. Everyone involved with your group or organisation should be able to articulate positive reasons for volunteer involvement.

# Be aware of people's motivations to volunteer

You've asked yourself why you need volunteers but equally important is why people want to volunteer - **what are their motivations?** This is important information if you want to attract the right kinds of volunteers for your group or organisation.

Numerous studies have been carried out about why people volunteer and there is a recognition that it is often borne of a combination of:

## **Altruism and self interest**

Basically people want to 'do good' but also wish to receive something in return which could be anything from gaining feelings of satisfaction to having work experience to add to their CV. In the book *Volunteering and the 21st Century*, the authors note the shift in people's motivations to volunteer and refer to it as '*Volunteering as serious leisure*'. (2) whereby people are inclined toward opportunities that are focused on 'self help and mutual aid'.

## **Mutuality and Reciprocity**

This essentially means that both parties are involved in an exchange from which both benefit. This can apply equally to the volunteer relationship with the group or organisation as a whole as well as their relationship with individual service users. For example, an elderly person has someone to talk to and help with tasks for a few hours a week, the befriender gets the experience needed for their chosen career in social work and the organisation has been able to meet a service user's needs via the use of a befriender.

(2) Rochester, C. Ellis Paine, A and S. Howlett (2010) *Volunteering and Society in the 21st Century* Palgrave Macmillan London

In our experience the best volunteering happens when both parties gain equally from the relationship. Once this balance shifts in either direction, the potential for a less than successful experience increases.

As long as volunteer motivations fit with the core purpose of what you are trying to achieve then it is in your interest to both identify and support what it is that volunteers want or need from volunteering.

And remember, if your volunteers are not having fun then chances are you're not doing it right. Whilst volunteers can do amazing things, they should ultimately enjoy the experience of giving you their time.

(3) Engaging Generations X and Y in volunteering  
[volunteeringwa.org.au](http://volunteeringwa.org.au)

### **Generational features of volunteering**

Did you know that age and the generational aspect of age impacts on people's motivations to volunteer? A number of studies have been conducted in this area and their findings can be helpful when thinking about volunteer motivations and how to both involve and retain volunteers. A study into research carried out by a volunteering organisation in Western Australia cites four groups of generational volunteers (3):

<b>Matures/seniors:</b>	those born before 1946
<b>Baby boomers:</b>	those born between 1946 and 1963
<b>Generation X:</b>	those born between 1964 and 1977
<b>Generation Y:</b>	those born between 1977 and 1994

According to the study these groups have different motivations in terms of what they want from their volunteer experience as well as what they're prepared to give, so you may want to think about how you promote your roles when targeting these different groups.

(4) Source: Merrill Associates, Move Over, Mom & Dad - We're not like you! 2003 and Merrill Associates, 2005

A study by Merrill Lynch associates (4) highlighted some of these factors as follows:

### **Gen Xers**

- May not connect with their grandparents' concept of volunteerism as civic duty.
- May not buy into their parents' optimism about changing the world.
- Feel capable of helping one person.
- May prefer to focus on local, not global issues, on tangible results, not idealism.

### **Gen Ys**

- Look for variety, stimulation and "push button" action.
- Are searching for their causes.
- Exhibit a strong interest in volunteering.

Those born after 1994 have been labelled 'Millennials'. Some of the key features of the generational changes that need to be taken into account are that whilst younger generations are signed up to volunteering they are inclined to ask: 'What's in it for me?' this is not necessarily about incentive or reward but more about a clear sense of how volunteering will support other goals, such as career development and the expansion of social networks.

Millennials are also more likely to be attracted to short term and/or flexible opportunities sometimes known as 'micro', 'speed' or episodic volunteering that will work around their timetables.

# Evaluate – but don't count beans!

Understanding how volunteers enable you to fulfil your objectives is important for how you shape the way you involve them going forward.

But instead of obsessing on numbers of volunteer hours given, how many volunteers you have and how long they stay for, focus instead on how you managed to make things better, either for your stakeholders or for your wider community. Use case studies, survey your services beneficiaries, measure wider impacts – such as a reduction in crime if that's your aim - and assess whether you've been able to achieve your objectives.

Bean counting may be useful for some funders but it rarely gives you a useful picture on how volunteers are making a difference. Your volunteers are essentially a resource to get things done, and whilst it's useful to understand their demographics, it's far more useful to assess the impact their time is having. After all, a volunteer run library does not spend time analysing its volunteers, instead they focus on the service they run and how many customers they are able to serve.

A really useful tool for getting to grips with volunteer impact is the NCVO's Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit – free to download.



[NCVO's Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit](#)

# Useful!

## Social media and networking

Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn - all have different groups, organisations and individuals who have a volunteering specialism and will keep you up to date with current thinking, trends and issues.

 [twitter.com](https://twitter.com)

 [facebook.com](https://facebook.com)

 [linkedin.com](https://linkedin.com)

## IVO

A social network for those working with volunteers and social action projects; IVO is free to use and enables members to connect with others, share resources and ask questions to get help from the community.

 [IVO \(ivo.org\)](https://ivo.org)

## UKVPMs

A forum that has been around for over 10 years. Members are made up of volunteer managers in national and local charities who exchange views and ideas about anything to do with involving and supporting volunteers.

 [UKVPM \(groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/UKVPMs/info\)](https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/UKVPMs/info)

## Association for Volunteer Managers

'A voice, a resource and a network in volunteer management'

 [Association for Volunteer Managers \(volunteermanagers.org.uk\)](https://volunteermanagers.org.uk)

## National Network for Volunteer Involving Agencies (NNVIA)

The network has over 70 member organisations. NNVIA organises meetings to bring people together to discuss policy and issues relating to volunteering. Further information is available via CSV who established the network in 2004

 [CSV Network for Volunteer Agencies \(csv.org.uk\)](https://csv.org.uk)

## Agencies and online resources

The UK Volunteering Forum is made up of four different organisations who all offer further information and advice about volunteering:

NCVO

 [NCVO \(ncvo.org.uk\)](https://ncvo.org.uk)

Volunteer Scotland

 [Volunteer Scotland \(volunteerscotland.net\)](https://volunteerscotland.net)

Volunteer Now (Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland)

 [Volunteer Now \(volunteernow.co.uk\)](https://volunteernow.co.uk)

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

 [Wales Council for Voluntary Action \(wcva.org.uk\)](https://wcva.org.uk)

Volunteer Centres

Offer advice, information and support for those wanting to establish or develop volunteering as well as assisting with recruitment.

NCVO offers a link for finding your local volunteer centre:

 [NCVO \(volunteering.org.uk/where-do-i-start\)](https://volunteering.org.uk/where-do-i-start)

Know How Non Profit

 [Know How Non Profit \(knowhownonprofit.org\)](https://knowhownonprofit.org) - offers a range of online guides and information on involving volunteers

## Literature and documents

From the Top Down: The Executive Role in Successful Volunteer Involvement, Energize Inc. *Ellis, S. (2010)*

On the Safe Side

Explores health, safety and risk management in volunteering, *Gaskin, K.,*

 [Institute for Volunteering Research \(ivr.org.uk\)](http://ivr.org.uk)

The Complete Volunteer Management Handbook

Directory of Social Change, London, *McCurley, S., Lynch, R. and R. Jackson (2012)*

Volunteers and the Law

Oversight of key issues relating to volunteers and legal issues, *Restall, M.* Free to download at:

 [Volunteering England \(volunteering.org.uk\)](http://volunteering.org.uk)

Please enter search term: “*Volunteers and the Law*”

Volunteering and Society in the 21st Century

Palgrave Macmillan, London, *Rochester, C., Ellis Paine, A. and S. Howlett (2010)*

## Do-it Yourself

Want to set up your own community project? Now is a great time to have a go and there are lots of resources available to get you started.

### UnLtd

the foundation for social entrepreneurs, a one stop shop of advice and support, including grants, to help people get their community projects off the ground.

 [UnLtd \(unltd.org.uk\)](http://unltd.org.uk)

### Kickstarter

the biggest crowd funding platform out there

 [Kickstarter \(kickstarter.com\)](http://kickstarter.com)

### O2 Think Big

O2 give out grants to young people set up community projects

 [O2 Think Big \(o2thinkbig.co.uk\)](http://o2thinkbig.co.uk)

### Social Startup Funders - Twitter list

A Twitter list of social start up support and funders, compiled by the folks at Year Here

 [Social Startup Funders  
\(twitter.com/yearhere/lists/social-startup-funders\)](https://twitter.com/yearhere/lists/social-startup-funders)

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