



4.0 Volunteers

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Volunteering

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Introduction

Equality is about treating people fairly, ensuring that they have equal access to opportunities and resources, regardless of;

- Age
- Disability
- Sex
- Gender reassignment
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity

Equality legislation requires organisations to act in ways that are transparent, consistent and fair regardless of individuals' identity or background.

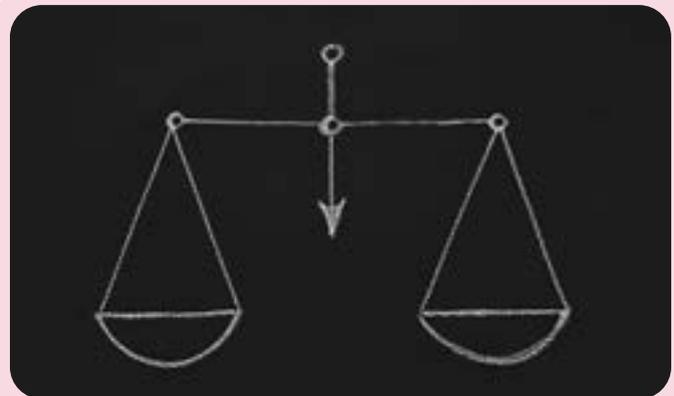


Image: Balanced scales

Current equality legislation does not specifically cover volunteers, however there are proposals in place to ensure the law on sexual harassment is extended to volunteers.

Furthermore, there is a moral and ethical imperative for organisations to interact with volunteers in ways which uphold principles of equality and inclusion, including;

- Being proactive in reducing barriers that prevent certain sectors of our communities from getting involved in volunteering
- Being vigilant in addressing behaviour, which is discriminatory, whether this be the behaviour of staff, volunteers or service users

Diversity is about celebrating difference. It is about more than 'fair play' and 'compliance' but has more to do with creating an ethos which values and welcomes the uniqueness of individuals.

Embracing diversity means drawing upon the widest possible range of views, backgrounds and experiences, so that an organisation can listen to, and meet, the changing needs of its users, staff, volunteers, partners and supporters.

Creating an inclusive environment can help counteract prejudice against a wide range of personal difference including those protected characteristics which are addressed by equality legislation and also, for example:

- Level of qualification
- Accent, language
- Physical and mental abilities
- Political affiliation
- Mental illness
- Spent or irrelevant convictions and trade union affiliation

Inclusion is the practice of ensuring that people feel a sense of belonging and support from the organisation. It is about the behaviours and social norms that ensure people feel welcome.

When involving volunteers, organisations are encouraged to take a proactive approach to inclusion, seeking to understand how volunteering opportunities can be as inclusive and accessible as possible by removing barriers and provide appropriate support. Different individuals may require different approaches to ensure volunteering is inclusive.

The Benefits of Diversity Within Organisations

Diverse organisations present a range of benefits which include:

- Presenting a more welcoming face to volunteers, client groups and the general public
- Being more representative of the community
- The ability to understand and better respond to the needs of the local community
- Improved volunteering recruitment, satisfaction, ongoing support for the cause and improved volunteer wellbeing

How to Increase the Diversity of Volunteers

The **Time Well Spent** report identifies that those from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to have been involved in volunteering, and those who have are less likely to be in a leadership role, such as that of a trustee.



External Link

A link to the Time Well Spent survey, a national survey into the experience of volunteering across the UK.

[Time Well Spent survey](#)

Research on volunteering, consistently indicates that inequalities of resources and power mean that some people are more likely to be excluded from certain activities.

Having a diversity statement or policy, whilst an important start, is not enough on its own. You will need to take an organisation wide strategic approach, to include the following aspects:

Creating an Inclusive Culture

An organisation should seek to create an inclusive culture within the organisation prior to recruiting a more diverse volunteer base. This could include ensuring that existing staff and volunteers have been appropriately trained, reflecting on the image and systems of the organisation to understand what real or perceived barriers there may be to inclusion and being proactive in seeking to understand why there may be reduced representation in the organisation's staff of volunteer base.

Attracting New Volunteers

Attracting a more diverse volunteer team requires active and targeted recruitment which addresses the barriers that currently exist for many within our society.

Consider and Reflect on the Following

- What languages are you using or making available?
- What impression does your publicity material give?
- Are your messages inclusive?
- Is there visible diversity in the images you use and your external presence?
- Where and how are you advertising for volunteers?
- Who is this expected to reach?
- Is the language, message and approach appropriate for this target group?

Monitor the diversity of your volunteers and analyse your data to identify unrepresented sections of the community. This will help to inform your recruitment strategy going forward and shape future planning.

Volunteers with disabilities, in the **Time Well Spent survey**, were found to be more likely to be on-line than non-disabled volunteers suggesting that digital platforms may be a great way to provide new opportunities for people with disabilities to volunteer.

Review the range of volunteer roles you have available;

- Are there roles likely to attract people of different age, gender, background, ability and interest?
- Do they include opportunities for one-off or short-term involvement as well as for regular commitment?
- Can some or part of these roles be carried out from home, or virtually?
- Do the roles have in built flexibility, allowing them to be tailored to meet different capabilities and requirements of volunteers?

Welcoming Volunteers on Board

Make sure you welcome all your volunteers and offer them a positive and tailored induction to your organisation. You might consider introducing a mentoring or buddy scheme, to help those new to your organisation to feel more connected and that they belong.

Training and induction methods will need to take into account that people learn in different ways. Consider and check out how comfortable the volunteer is with, **for example, reading long documents or speaking aloud in a group**. A variety of training methods is advisable alongside flexibility in using alternative approaches when necessary, including making reasonable adjustments where needed.

Volunteering should be, from the volunteer's perspective, informal, satisfying and **'user-friendly'**. Too much bureaucracy and **'small print'** can easily exclude and deter people – recent research in the **Time Well Spent** indicates that for too many volunteers, volunteering can feel too similar to work. However, **'behind the scenes'** organisations should have in place rigorous management processes to ensure volunteering is safe, effective and impactful.

From the outset, consider volunteers' needs for support and supervision. This will vary according to the role, and according to the needs and personality of the volunteer. Ask volunteers if they have any particular support needs and discuss ways in which these might be addressed. **For example, think about how you can modify equipment or adapt the volunteer role in a way which meets an individual's needs and creates opportunities for success and impact.**

Working With Volunteers

When making arrangements for volunteering, including place of volunteering, meetings, events and activities, consider the effect of your decisions on the entire volunteering group. For example,

- Is the time and date of the volunteering appropriate for all volunteers? Does it fall at a time when younger volunteers are in education or on a day of cultural significance? Could there be different date and time options for volunteers?
- Is the location of the volunteering accessible to all? This will also need to be considered if it is a virtual venue. Do your volunteers have the skills, confidence and equipment to access online spaces?
- Are there costs to volunteers to access volunteering? Will they need to pay for transport, food, access to particular software, like a Zoom account, to be able to take part. If so can you cover these expenses? Is prompt payment possible for volunteers?
- Are your staff and other volunteers trained and supported to understand and reflect on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion? Are there any behaviours or ways of working that could make others feel excluded? Have you thought about how you could support all staff and volunteers to feel comfortable?

If there are likely to be changes that will affect volunteers (i.e. moving all volunteering online or using a new procedure), think about how these changes could affect your existing volunteers, whether these changes will still be inclusive and ensure your communications about the changes can be accessed and understood by all volunteers. Involve volunteers in the development of your organisation (**including its diversity strategies**) by asking for their input to your discussion and decision making.

Consider how an ethos of diversity is nurtured within your organisation? Recent research indicates that younger people, people with disabilities and those from those from ethnically diverse communities are more likely to be dissatisfied with their volunteering experiences than older, non-disabled volunteers or those who are white British. Consider therefore, how your organisation can work towards being more accessible and supportive to people from diverse backgrounds.

Learning From Experience

Creating an open and inclusive culture helps to create a positive and harmonious working and volunteering environment. However, things do sometimes go wrong. When they do arise, problems need to be handled with care, and lessons can often be learned from them.

Many organisations have mechanisms to gather staff and / or volunteer feedback and insights. Ensuring that all volunteers have access to contribute to these can support organisations to continuously improve how they manage and support volunteers.

All volunteers should be made aware how to raise a concern or complaint, and with whom. Similarly, volunteers should be made aware what is expected of them and what will happen if they display inappropriate behaviour, including discriminatory behaviour.

When volunteers leave, for whatever reason, you may gain valuable insight into their experience, including any negative aspects, by carrying out some kind of **'exit interview'**.

References

Framework for Equality Legislation

Welsh Assembly

<http://www.assemblywales.org/tb-09-002.pdf>

Time Well Spent Survey

NCVO

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

Investing in Volunteers Standard

Investing in Volunteers

<https://iiv.investinginvolunteers.org.uk/download-the-standard>



Cefnogi Trydydd
Sector **Cymru**

Third Sector
Support **Wales**

Third Sector Support Wales is a network of support organisations for the whole of the third sector in Wales.

It consists of the 19 local and regional support bodies across Wales, the County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) and the national support body, Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA).

For further information contact
<https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/contact/>

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