

Volunteering

Big Local depends on volunteers - people who give their time and energy for the benefit of their area. That may mean helping steer a local project, or joining a partnership, or one of the many other ways in which people can take part according to their own interests, skills and availability. We hope you find these notes useful in recruiting and motivating your volunteers and helping them get the most out of volunteering.

What is volunteering?

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) defines volunteering as:

“Any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.”

We understand that people who volunteer for Big Local have other things going on in their lives. You may be a carer, have a family, a job, or other voluntary work, or all of those commitments. We don't expect Big Local volunteers to do Big Local activities all of the time!

Why volunteer?

We know that volunteers can make a positive difference to communities. But there's also evidence that volunteering itself can transform people's lives. It can help build close friendships and new social networks, which in turn help make communities stronger. It can contribute to improved health, happiness and well-being. It can increase skills and confidence. It can lead to more opportunities. And volunteer action is sometimes better at identifying what it is that a community wants to get done.

An NCVO research project, Pathways through Participation, found that most people volunteer for personal reasons. Something happens that makes them want to do something (perhaps a personal experience, a world event, or suddenly having more spare time), and then - just at the right moment - someone asks them to help or to get involved. A typical volunteer will dip in and out throughout their life. So volunteering is about getting involved with the issues we care about, when we feel ready and able to do so.

Rewarding volunteers

Rewarding volunteers is a good way to let them know that you value them. But the reward shouldn't involve money, or anything that could be used for profit – this could be considered as earnings, and there is a risk that the relationship becomes contractual, rather than voluntary.

There are many other ways to reward volunteers: you can hold events such as meals or awards parties or organise fun activities. People also appreciate small gestures such as a thank-you card or a certificate.

Even though volunteers are not paid, it is good practice to ensure that they are not left out of pocket because they are volunteering. For example, you might want to reimburse travel expenses. It is best to have a policy for this, setting out what volunteers can and can't claim for,



and make it easily available. Your locally trusted organisation may have a volunteering policy that covers this.

Getting people involved

Many Big Local areas tell us they find it difficult to attract volunteers and keep them involved, and that they end up relying too heavily on a small number of people.

The answer is to try and make volunteering an enjoyable and attractive experience for everyone. There will always be a need for some unglamorous or even boring work. But how many of the things that you do could happen in ways that are fun and attractive to more of the community?

1. **Be creative.** Formal meetings can put people off. Instead of sitting round a table or listening to a presentation, you could try:
 - get people discussing important issues in small groups or in pairs and report back
 - take straw polls at community events, or (on an even bigger scale) participatory budgeting, where large numbers of people vote on important funding decisions
 - online surveys or voting apps.
2. **Be clear** and specific about what you want people to do, when and for how long - for example, to run your group's Facebook page for a year, or help organise a one-off event in the local school in the summer holidays.
3. **Offer a range of opportunities.** Big Local areas do need core volunteers to help guide Big Local and be members of the Big Local partnership. But this kind of commitment won't suit everyone. Some people might prefer something active, or outdoors, or a task they can do in their own time or just for a short time.
4. **Remove the barriers.** A barrier is anything that can prevent someone from getting involved. So make sure there are no obstacles or challenges that could hold people back from being involved. If someone has a physical disability or has young children, or doesn't speak English, or gets anxious speaking in front of groups, then you can think about how to accommodate their needs so those things don't become barriers.
5. **Find new ways to plan events and activities.** Instead of holding planning meetings, think about using one event to plan for the next one. For example, you could go round getting people to sign up for various jobs, and at the same time find out what they'd like to do. You already have a captive audience and the buzz of the moment - strike while the iron's hot!
6. **Support and invest in each other.** We offer a range of support to Big Local areas, which includes learning and networking events, area-buddying visits and skills courses.

It's also important to support each other locally. Think about:

- How you treat each other as volunteers, taking into account other people's circumstances.
- How much you can reasonably commit to in addition to the demands of your life.
- What skills and strengths you already have and what you would like to develop through support or training.



And don't forget - you can ask for help. We all sometimes get fed-up or tired when we feel that we have too much to do. If things are getting too much for you, ask for help from other members of the partnership or steering group, locally trusted organisation or Big Local rep.

Recruitment, induction and training for volunteers

Volunteers will have a much better experience and be more likely to continue to volunteer if you are clear about the types of tasks you want them to do:

1. **Give them the bigger picture.** Set aside time to tell them about Big Local, your priorities and your activities, and how their volunteering fits in to that.
2. **Agree a volunteer job description**, so that you are both clear about the role and about each other's expectations. The job description should set out the tasks you'd like the volunteer to do but should also give them some control and choice over their work. Remember that volunteers bring a range of skills, experience and ideas with them.
3. **Offer volunteers appropriate induction and training** - for example, by placing them with someone experienced to shadow, or by giving them notes about the job, or both.
4. **Provide basic information** such as health-and-safety guidelines and fire and emergency procedures, and where they can find the toilets and drinking water.

The NCVO website provides a list of the sort of documents and policies that are going to be of use to most organisations involving volunteers.

Volunteering and benefits

There is no limit on the number of hours a week you can be a volunteer. However, this may affect people who are receiving certain benefits. For more information please see the Citizens Advice Bureau advice guide on volunteering.

More information

V Inspired – an independent charity dedicated to helping young people volunteer in ways that matter to them.

Do-it Trust - the UK's national volunteering database, Do-it.org makes it easy for anyone to volunteer in their community.

NCVO - committed to supporting, enabling and celebrating volunteering in all its diversity. NCVO has support and resources for all aspects of volunteering.



This document will be developed over time with input from the people using this material.

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