

Diversity and Equal Opportunities

A diverse organisation is one which values difference. It is one which recognises that people with different backgrounds, skills, attitudes and experiences bring fresh ideas and perceptions. Many organisations are now becoming aware of the numerous benefits of having a diverse volunteer 'workforce'. The population is changing and organisations need to reflect people's increasing diversity in order to be relevant and effective. By increasing the diversity of your volunteers, your organisation will:

- present a more welcoming face to client groups, the general public and to other potential volunteers.
- be more representative of our wider society
- be more able to meet the needs of our local community
- benefit from new ideas and fresh approaches generated by people from different cultures, genders, ages and outlooks
- attract more customers and service users – if volunteers are drawn from a wider sector of the community and they each tell their family and friends, the profile of your service will be raised.

For these reasons it is advisable to cast your net as widely as possible when recruiting new volunteers, making sure that you are not just attracting people from similar backgrounds. You may want to ask yourself who isn't volunteering with your organisation. If people from certain groups are not coming forward, there are a number of ways that your organisation can build a more diverse volunteer team.

An important step in attracting volunteers from diverse backgrounds is to look at the way you advertise for and recruit volunteers and you may want to consider the following tips:

- When deciding where to put your materials you will need to display them in different places to attract older or disabled people, people from minority communities, working parents, etc.
- If you are using images in your publicity materials, do they show diversity?
- Use clear and easily understandable English and avoid jargon.
- Try to work out what would 'hook' the group you are trying to reach. E.g. if you're trying to attract younger volunteers, talk about how volunteering can enhance their CV.
- Use typefaces and colours that are easily read.
- Think about producing your materials in different formats such as tape, Braille or video.

There are other ways of encouraging diversity and you could also:

- Look at the arrangements you make for volunteers and ensure that they enable everyone to get involved. E.g. Can you pay expenses? Are you offering a choice of ways for volunteers to get involved? When organising meetings or other training activities do they take place at flexible times? Can you tailor an opportunity to suit a volunteer's availability?
- Make sure you welcome all your volunteers and give them a good induction
- Ask your volunteers if they need extra support or modified equipment such as textphones, screen magnifiers or large button telephones.
- Involve volunteers fully in the development of your organisation and ask them for their thoughts.

Equal Opportunities Policy

Volunteer Bureaux actively support the principle that volunteering should be open to everyone and we work to ensure that everybody wanting to volunteer has access to volunteering opportunities.

Clearly, not everybody is suited to every type of volunteering opportunity and organisations need to have some sort of selection procedure. However, an organisation should only take relevant criteria (such as skills, experience and aptitude) into account when making a decision about a person's suitability for a particular

opportunity. Essentially, a potential volunteer should not be discriminated against simply on grounds of race, sex, age, ethnic or national background, religion, sexual orientation, disability, HIV status or any other form of discrimination which hinders the promotion of equal opportunities.

While volunteers are generally not covered by equal opportunities legislation, it is good practice to include them in your equal opportunities policy. Ideally all your policies will have a commitment to equal opportunities at heart and an Equal Opportunities Policy for volunteers is a good way of demonstrating your organisation's commitment to including volunteers from different backgrounds. You may therefore wish to extend or adapt your existing Equal Opportunities Policy for staff to include volunteers.

Further information

For more information on diversity, including tips on how to diversify your volunteer 'workforce', visit www.diversitychallenge.org

A Route to Opportunity: A series of booklets covering Volunteering by Older People, People with Disabilities, Unemployed People, Black People and Young People.

Produced by The National Centre for Volunteering for organisations trying to encourage under-represented groups to become volunteers. Cost £5.00 each Telephone the information service on 0800 028 3304.