

Involving Volunteers – Online Course

Learning Journal

**Introduction to your journal**

Welcome to Volunteer Scotland’s Involving Volunteers course. We hope that you will enjoy your time on the course and we hope you use this journal to help you become actively involved in thinking about the concepts, theories and ideas presented to you. The action planning at the end of each section will build towards a final action from the course.

By the end of the course you will:

* be clear about how volunteering fits into your context and the opportunities it provides
* be able to develop an appropriate way of getting to know volunteers and for volunteers to get to know you
* understand the importance of supporting volunteers and communicating the difference their contribution makes
* be able to identify the volunteers’ voice in order to learn from volunteers’ experiences and ensure that they have a positive volunteering journey.

**Volunteer Scotland - Volunteer Management Model**

The course is structured around the four stages of the volunteer management model (below) from the perspective of a volunteer as they pass through different phases of their volunteering ‘journey’. The model takes the volunteer and group or organisation through their journey from **Thinking about Volunteering**, to **Getting Started** and then on to **Making a Difference** and **Building on Success.**

In each of the four sections we ask you to consider some key issues. You will explore and reflect on these in your context and then develop an appropriate action plan for your situation.

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**Thinking About Volunteering**

From the volunteers’ perspective there are two essential areas that this section will cover:

* ‘Be ready’ – volunteers say that they want a group or an organisation to have fully considered the involvement of volunteers and to be clear about why volunteers are needed and what they will be asked to do.
* ‘Is this right for me?’ – volunteers also say that they need the right information to decide if the opportunity is right for them. This is all about sharing and understanding each other’s expectations.

**Activity 1**

Please take some time to consider the following points in relation to your context:

1. Why do you think people choose to volunteer with your group or organisation, or why might they want to, if you don’t involve volunteers yet?
2. Why did you decide to involve volunteers?
3. How does the involvement of volunteers fit with the values of your group or organisation?
4. What are the benefits that involving volunteers will bring to both the volunteer and the group or organisation?

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| Benefits to the volunteer | Benefits for the group or organisation |
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1. What tasks or activities do you need volunteers to help with?

**Activity 2**

In this next activity, the focus is on what you can do to help a person decide if your group or organisation, and the potential volunteering roles on offer, will be right for them. Potential volunteers rely on how clearly you can communicate what volunteers can expect so they are able to decide whether this might fit with their own expectations. It’s the step that gets them from the idea of volunteering to the decision to contact your group or organisation.

Some things to consider might be:

1. How would a potential volunteer find out what to expect from you?
2. How would they ask questions if they had specific needs?
3. Are there written policies and procedures about volunteering?

You might want to discuss these questions with others. Don’t forget to record your reflections in your learning journal.

**Activity 3 - Action Plan**

In your learning journal, note three actions that you want to take from the learning in this section. Prioritise these and write the most important one into your final action plan at the end of the journal.

You might have thought of something that wasn’t significant enough to write in your action plan that you could do easily that would improve the experience for volunteers. Just do it now.

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| What could I do differently following this section? | Who could help me to do this? | What might be the impact of this improvement? | What resource will I need to take this action forward? | Finally, prioritise these from 1 to 3. Put the top one at the end of the journal. |
| Example: Better understand why we involve volunteers. | Board, staff and volunteers | Everyone will share a common understanding | Time to attend team meetings or have a volunteer get together |  |
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From the volunteers’ perspective there are two essential areas that this section will cover:

**Getting Started**

* ‘How am I supported?’ – volunteers say that they want to be supported to effectively undertake their role and make a difference. They want to be able to carry out their role in an environment that enhances and protects their wellbeing. It is also about effective communication that ensures the group or organisation knows how the volunteer is getting on in their role.
* ‘What have I achieved?’ – volunteers also say that they need to be able to see the bigger picture and the contribution that they have made, as this helps provide them with a sense of achievement, belonging and value.

**Activity 4**

Here you are asked to reflect on your context and how you get to know potential volunteers and they get to know you.

1. Write down five things you will need to know about a volunteer.
2. Consider the methods that have been previously outlined and identify how you will find out this information about the potential volunteer.

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| Things you need to know about a volunteer | Which method will you use to find this out? |
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1. Write down five things that an individual might need to know about your group or organisation.
2. Again, using the methods outlined, when and how will the potential volunteer be able to find out this information?

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| Things a volunteer might want to know | Which method will enable them to find this out? |
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**Activity 5**

When planning an induction process, the main thing you want to avoid is overwhelming a new volunteer with too much information. There are some key areas to consider and prioritise, which you will consider in this activity. Reflect on these and make notes in your learning journal.

1. **What?** Write on post-it notes all the things you think a volunteer needs to know as they get started. Make sure you cover both information on the group or organisation and details for them to be effective in their role. Think about how you will also create space for people to express their own interests and get to know others in the group or organisation.
2. **When (priority)?** Re-order your post-it notes to prioritise when on the volunteers’ ‘getting started’ journey you will share the information. Consider what is important enough that you want to make sure you cover it on day one, and what is less urgent.
3. **How?** Induction is a process rather than an event. So, are you going to bring everyone together face to face to cover the top priority information? Or could some aspects be undertaken online or even read in a volunteering handbook? Does specific training need to be undertaken before starting, or could it be picked up ‘on the job’? You could also consider involving a longer-term volunteer as a buddy or mentor for people starting out. Considering these questions will also tell you the length of your induction period.
4. **When (delivery)?** You also need to consider whenthe induction will be delivered. If you have asked a volunteer to make a monthly commitment on a Saturday, you can’t expect them to be available on a Monday and a Tuesday for two full days of induction.
5. **Where?** For some groups or organisations you will also need to consider where you hold your induction to make it accessible for volunteers.

**Your notes:**

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| **What** | **When (priority/delivery)** | **How** | **Where** |
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**Activity 6 - Action Plan**

In your learning journal, note three actions that you want to take from the learning in this section. Prioritise these and write the most important one into your final action plan at the end of the journal.

You might have thought of something that wasn’t significant enough to write in your action plan that you could do easily that would improve the experience for volunteers. Just do it now!

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| What could I do differently following this section? | Who could help me to do this? | What might be the impact of this improvement? | What resource will I need to take this action forward? | Finally, prioritise these from 1 to 3. Put the top one at the end of the journal. |
| Example: Get others involved in meeting potential volunteers | Current longer-term volunteers or relevant members of staff who will work alongside volunteers. | Volunteers and staff will appreciate having a say in which new volunteers will be joining the team. | Volunteer or staff time.  Meeting space for chat.  Relevant paperwork.  Tea & biscuits! |  |
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**Making a Difference**

From the volunteers’ perspective there are two essential areas that this section will cover:

* ‘How am I supported?’ – volunteers say that they want to be supported to effectively undertake their role and make a difference. They want to be able to carry out their role in an environment that enhances and protects their wellbeing. It is also about effective communication that ensures the group or organisation knows how the volunteer is getting on in their role.
* ‘What have I achieved?’ – volunteers also say that they need to be able to see the bigger picture and the contribution that they have made, as this helps provide them with a sense of achievement, belonging and value.

**Activity 7**

Thinking about what support is appropriate in your context, you may want to reflect on:

1. Risks and ‘health and safety’ factors and how these are addressed.
2. What kinds of support are available on a day to day basis to promote volunteers’ individual wellbeing?
3. What are the long-term plans to support volunteers, including developing knowledge and skills?
4. How are any specific support needs that relate to a person, role or their individual circumstances addressed?
5. Have you asked volunteers how they would like to be supported?

Remember it has to be proportionate for your context and right for the volunteers.

**Activity 8**

Reflecting on what you have read, ask yourself:

1. What do you want to know more about; the impact *on* volunteers or the impact *of* volunteers?
2. What is the contribution that volunteers make on a day to day basis?
3. How do you monitor volunteers’ contributions?
4. What other methods might you use to evaluate what’s going well or what could be improved?
5. Is the difference that their contribution makes clear to the volunteer?
6. How do you communicate and celebrate this difference both internally and externally, in a way that is proportionate for the context?

**Activity 9 - Action Plan**

In your learning journal, note three actions that you want to take from the learning in this section. Prioritise these and write the most important one into your final action plan at the end of the journal.

You might have thought of something that wasn’t significant enough to write in your action plan that you could do easily that would improve the experience for volunteers. Just do it now!

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| What could I do differently following this section? | Who could help me to do this? | What might be the impact of this improvement? | What resource will I need to take this action forward? | Finally, prioritise these from 1 to 3. Put the top one at the end of the journal. |
| Example: plan some informal peer support to go with the 6 monthly 1:1. | Speak to current volunteers to get their thoughts. | Volunteers feel better supported in their roles and feel part of a team. | Time and maybe meeting space depending on what’s decided. |  |
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**Building on Success**

From the volunteers’ perspective there are two essential areas that this section will cover:

* ‘Enjoy it, love it, be happy!’ – volunteers say that they want their volunteering experience to meet their expectations. This might be opportunities to develop (in the role or into a new role), to have their views taken on board and to contribute more to the group or organisation or continue to be supported in their role so they don’t ‘burn out’.
* ‘Don’t make me feel guilty, let me go!’ – volunteers also say that they want to have a positive ending to their volunteering, where they are encouraged to progress personally even if this is on to new things.

**Activity 10**

Thinking about the opportunities to listen to and learn from volunteers that are appropriate in your context:

1. What kinds of opportunities exist at present for volunteers to share their reflections and learning?
2. What happens to any insights, recommendations or offers from volunteers? How are they acted on? How are volunteers involved in the process?
3. Can volunteers see evidence that their views matter and the group or organisation learns from them?
4. How do you continue to support volunteers to ensure that their volunteering is meeting their expectations and they are not taking on too much?

**Activity 11**

Thinking about what is appropriate in your own context consider:

1. How can you support volunteers in their personal development that would allow them to grow into a new role in your organisation or elsewhere?
2. Are there appropriate mechanisms in place to learn from volunteers before they move on?
3. When volunteers do move on, how is their contribution recognised?
4. How are you planning to ensure you will continue to involve more volunteers in the future?

**Activity 12 - Action Plan**

In your learning journal, note three actions that you want to take from the learning in this section. Prioritise these and write the most important one into your final action plan at the end of the journal.

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| What could I do differently following this section? | Who could help me to do this? | What might be the impact of this improvement? | What resource will I need to take this action forward? | Finally, prioritise these from 1 to 3. Put the top one at the end of the journal. |
| Example: seek suggestions for development from volunteers | Volunteers and relevant staff members | Volunteers feel that they can shape their role and group delivery. | Need to plan, consider development session with vols or form for anonymous contributions. |  |
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**Improving Volunteering Practice – Final Action Plan**

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| What could I do differently following this section? | Who could help me to do this? | What might be the impact of this improvement? | What resource will I need to take this action forward? |
| **Thinking about volunteering. Put your top action below.** | | | |
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| **Getting started. Put your top action below.** | | | |
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| **Making a difference. Put your top action below.** | | | |
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| **Building on success. Put your top action below.** | | | |
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