

OLDER PEOPLE AND VOLUNTEERING

A good practice checklist for organisations involving older people.

- Find out what life experience and skills older people can offer. They can be useful for a range of volunteer roles.
- Work out older volunteers' motivation for volunteering. Retirement or the death of a
 partner are motives particular to older people. Research highlights, other more general
 motives such as wanting to 'give something back', socialising and meeting new people.¹
- Check if older people want to do something completely different from their working life. This may be a motive for some people.
- Think about the messages you give in your adverts. Make it clear how a volunteer's role
 contributes to your organisation and its value. Use pictures to demonstrate what
 volunteers do and make it clear you welcome applications from all older people, regardless
 of race, religion, gender, age, sexuality and disability.
- Consider where you advertise opportunities. You can target older people more actively by
 placing adverts in places where older people usually go using written adverts or talks. Also
 consider using local and community radio stations or contacting organisations that work
 with older people directly.
- Remember that a potential volunteer is offering you something that will hopefully benefit
 your organisation, so treat them well. Respond to enquiries promptly and make sure that
 your recruitment processes are not too bureaucratic.
- Check what other commitments older volunteers have. Asking for a short period of commitment in a week and being flexible about the timings can help attract volunteers, as it makes it easier to fit around their other commitments.
- Establish volunteers' availability. Often they have greater flexibility because of a lack of work commitments.
- Having said this, bear in mind that many older people with families are involved in helping
 with their grandchildren's childcare. This can impact on their availability to volunteer
 during school holidays and at other times. Be flexible and look for ways to meet their
 changing needs. Ask early on how you might handle a clash of commitments. Possible
 strategies for busy periods might include;

¹ Niyazi, Filiz (1996), 'Volunteering by Older People: a route to opportunity, National Centre for Volunteering'





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- helping volunteers to swap shifts
- planning for them being off
- seeing if other volunteers with fewer commitments can do extra hours
- working from home may be possible for some volunteer roles
- Manage volunteers' expectations. Keep role descriptions clear so volunteers know what is expected of them. Also use a volunteer policy, so volunteers are clear about what they can expect from your organisation.
- Older volunteers are not necessarily defined as being vulnerable. For a definition see the CRB website; http://www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk/faqs/definitions.aspx
- There's no upper age limit for volunteering. Treat volunteers as individuals and let them tell you what they can and can't do.
- Do not use the cost of insurance premiums as an excuse to discriminate against older volunteers. Find out what the costs are and if necessary consider budgeting for it. In particular this might apply to driving roles.
- If a volunteer is finding a role demanding, then look at ways it can be adapted. You might consider some of the following strategies;
 - taking breaks and resting
 - not doing certain elements of a role
 - transferring to a similar but less strenuous role
 - suggest working shorter periods (maybe 2 hours, rather than ½ a day for example)
 - encourage a more able volunteer to support a less able one
 - let volunteers determine their own pace of working
- Take into account transport to and from your organisation for older and more frail
 volunteers. Extra costs can be exaggerated and many older volunteers can still drive and
 use public transport. Creative ways to support volunteers include encouraging car sharing
 or organising drops at convenient meeting points.
- When designing training with older people bear in mind that they may be used to certain ways of learning. This will influence their perceptions and opinions of training.
- For those who are reluctant to undertake training (and other formal procedures like supervisions), stress its importance to the success of the project. Try to use any relevant experience they have during your sessions. Consider calling it something different, such as





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an 'information morning' or 'best practice discussions' and hold it in a less formal setting.

- As older volunteers stay longer with organisations on average², it is important to consider what opportunities there are for them to progress and get involved in different activities.
- Ensure you have regular supervisions. This will enable you to check in with volunteers and be aware of any difficulties they are having. This will help you to make any adjustments to meet their needs.

Sources:

Niyazi, Filiz (1996), 'Volunteering by Older People: a route to opportunity, National Centre for Volunteering'

Rutherford, Janet (2006), 'A Golden Opportunity. A Guide to attracting and retaining older volunteers', REACH

Thanks to Bob Maggs (RSVP South West) for sharing his experience.

² Rutherford, Janet (2006), 'A Golden Opportunity. A Guide to attracting and retaining older volunteers', REACH

