

Volunteer Recruitment Toolkit

Written and produced by Museums Worcestershire

Introduction

Volunteering with a museum is a wonderful, mutually beneficial relationship. Volunteers bring skills, energy and experience to a museum and contribute towards worthwhile projects and long-term aspirations.

Recruiting the right volunteers, in the right way, is as essential as ensuring that they feel valued, respected and well-resourced. Forward planning, a clear purpose and understanding what your museum has to offer volunteers is crucial in creating a positive and constructive relationship that will be a true asset to your museum.

Guiding principles

1. Is your organisation ready to recruit volunteers?

Volunteer recruitment needs as much careful planning as staff recruitment. Ensure you have your policies and procedures in place.

2. What volunteer roles are right for your museum?

Clearly identify the roles you would like volunteers to fulfil and how this can be an enjoyable use of their time.

3. Recruit well.

Finding the best volunteer for your role is crucial. Think about how and where to market.

4. Measure your success.

Your job does not end at recruitment. Be ready to measure and manage your volunteers' progress, wellbeing and direction.

5. Evolve.

Use your findings to improve your relationship and effectiveness and share that with others.

Set your goals

Remember to set SMART goals

Specific: Define clearly what you are hoping to achieve. Know what unique experiences you can offer to volunteers.

Measurable: Set targets, goals and deadlines. Conduct feedback sessions with the volunteers to measure their wellbeing and gather feedback.

Achievable: Aim for something attainable. Multiple smaller goals give a good sense of progress and achievement.

Realistic: Don't overstretch yourself. Ensure you have capacity to oversee and resource all of your volunteers.

Time: Good recruitment and induction takes time, as does building a good relationship with your volunteers. Results may not be immediate, but will come if you invest the effort.

Conduct an audit

- Don't recruit volunteers just because they might be useful. Have clear aims and objectives.
- Volunteers are not free labour. Understand why working with volunteers will be beneficial.
- Volunteer recruitment and coordination needs time and effort. Do you have capacity to fulfil this?
- How will you assess the wellbeing and progress of your volunteers?
- Will the new roles compliment your existing staff and volunteers?
- Volunteers will need training, equipment and leadership. Are you ready to provide this?

Getting your policies and procedures ready

Don't reinvent the wheel! Reuse existing procedures.

Documents for volunteers you will already have

- Safeguarding policy
- Code of conduct
- Equality and Diversity policy / Access policy
- Risk Assessments
- Health and Safety policy
- Fire and Emergency procedures

There are also many unique procedures that you will need to design.

Documents specifically for volunteers

- Volunteer application form
- Volunteer reference questions
- Volunteer induction handbook about your organisation
- Volunteer policy
- Emergency contact information
- Confidentiality agreement
- Support and supervision documents

The right roles for your museum

Things to consider when creating volunteer role profiles:

- What kinds of roles can you provide? Regular, project volunteering, occasional or micro volunteering, or even remote volunteering.
- Identify opportunities that you can recruit for and / or you can have an ad hoc approach where you try and find roles to meet a volunteer's needs.
- Keep it flexible. Volunteers don't need to have a degree to come to your museum, they need to have passion, enthusiasm and a willingness to learn.

Creating a role description

Would I like to do this role, what could attract me to it? What would I get out of it if I were the volunteer?

What training would I need?

What sort of person / sort of skills would be needed to fill this role?

How would I measure success?

Being open minded about attendance is a huge bonus for a potential volunteer.

You cannot expect a volunteer to do anything, however you can ask that they respect their role within the organisation.

🔍 Handy hints

Volunteers are not paid staff, but there must be some positive take away for anyone giving up their time. This could simply be the opportunity for socialising, exercise, having fun, or knowing your time is building towards something worthwhile. Volunteers will not receive a salary, but you do owe them a rewarding experience so get to know them and offer projects that will keep them coming back for more.

Museums Worcestershire case study – Volunteers at Home

A ground breaking new project, Volunteers at Home gives access to the isolated through volunteering. This work uses remote volunteering opportunities, bringing a flexible approach to volunteers who are unable to come onsite.

Funded by the Museums Association - Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, it looks at providing opportunities for volunteers during the pandemic. This project brings collections into volunteer's homes to support our curatorial team, develop new skills and enjoy the social aspect of volunteering through online platforms to support wellbeing.

Wishing to still provide opportunities for volunteers, we believed that if we could find ways to help our current volunteers through isolation then we could make a difference and continue to deliver the important work of caring for our collections.

Our solution was to devise a way of safely allowing our volunteers to take museum objects into their own homes and continue with object research, cataloguing and conservation work.

This work has changed how Museums Worcestershire works with volunteers, providing flexible opportunities and much more accessible ways of volunteering.

Action plan

Short term actions

- Understand clearly why you require volunteers and what you would like them to undertake.
- Know what is special about your museum and what makes your project work rewarding.
- Plan how you will manage and resource volunteers when you have recruited them.
- Plan how volunteers compliment your staff or existing volunteer structure by consulting colleagues.

TOP TIP: Don't regret your outcomes when it is too late. Good planning here ensures you get the results that you intended.

Medium term actions

- Devise or re-familiarise yourself with your volunteer policy and procedures.
- Create an application process and all necessary recruitment information.
- Ensure you have induction methods and provision for training ready for your volunteers.
- Risk assess your activities, so that you are taking every effort to protect your team.
- Advertise and recruit your new volunteers.

TOP TIP: Budget for your activities so that your volunteers have the resources that they need to undertake their new roles immediately.

Long term actions

- Measure your volunteers' level of wellbeing by regularly gathering feedback.
- Evaluate your methods and see how you can better enhance your offer and make your volunteers' time more effective.
- Use your findings to plan effective and new volunteer projects within your organisation.
- Look at how you can make beneficial volunteer placements accessible to more people and increase your inclusivity.

TOP TIP: Measure the impact that your volunteers have had. This is not only good feedback, but an effective planning tool.

Resources & further reading

Links to documentation templates

Places to find good templates for these forms –

GEM Volunteer Organisers Toolkit - <https://gem.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Volunteer-Organisers-Toolkit-resource.pdf>

AIM guidance on Successfully Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers -

<https://www.aim-museums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Successfully-Recruiting-and-Retaining-Volunteers.pdf>

Websites for further advice

Heritage Volunteering Group - <http://www.heritagevolunteeringgroup.org.uk/>

NCVO - <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/>

Do-It - <https://do-it.org/>

Local organisations who could offer support or guidance

Visit the website of your Museum Development provider for specific information available locally. They will also offer regular training.

Check to see if your local volunteer centre can support your recruitment.

Evaluation

Create some prompts and tips for evaluating progress along the way, and at the end of a project. Revisit and adapt your original goals if needs be; taking stock of what staff and volunteers have learned. This will differ for organisations of different types and sizes, so ensure you make something manageable and relevant.

Success lies in real change and it is important to see this work as long term. Evaluate how your volunteers felt when they joined you and what they hoped to achieve and follow this up regularly with catchups and feedback sessions. Record your aspirations and how far your volunteers have moved you to these goals. All of these things will inform how well you feel you are progressing as a team and where you might invest some more time or consider different recruitment methods.

You will need to continue to refresh how you work and what you do, and do regular evaluations every 6-12 months. Your needs and volunteer needs will change, and your work needs to reflect that.

But if you have happy volunteers who keep coming back and they spread the word, then that's a very good sign of success.



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