



# Diverse Volunteers

*“Something I used to hear quite often in the Volunteer Centre was “we’re all too old to run our group now. We need new people, otherwise we’ll have to close.” Sadly one or two did. Perhaps your organisation is in a similar position? You may have a lot of older volunteers who could possibly be retiring from your organisation within the next five years. Where would that leave your service?”*

The obvious answer is to find more volunteers. In doing so perhaps you could use the opportunity to diversify and look at groups of people you may not have thought about approaching before. There are several good reasons for doing so. Volunteers from all backgrounds could bring:

- New ideas.
- Ideas for re-vamping long-running projects.
- Fresh skills.
- Different viewpoints.
- Experience.

**For example**, say your organisation relies solely on older volunteers and fundraising is limited to raffles and bring and buys. A young person could come along to volunteer and suggest that his school has a sponsored Mars bar eating contest with the proceeds going to your organisation. Or perhaps a man in his 40’s who works for a large company could suggest staff have a lunchtime bingo session in the canteen, with proceeds again going to your organisation.

Just by taking on two new people of different ages, your organisation has access to potentially two new fundraising opportunities.

It isn’t just about fundraising either. People from different backgrounds may know of different places where you can advertise for volunteers, or where you can promote your organisation the work and organisation are for them.

**Maybe you think you have a diverse organisation already. But how can you tell?**

Draw up a brief survey such as the one below and treat it as confidential. Some of the headings are sensitive and the volunteer/trustee involved may not want people to know about their sexuality or mental health problems.

## Diversity Survey for Volunteers

Currently we have the following number of volunteers and trustees from the backgrounds in column 1. There will no doubt be some overlap with some volunteers covering two or more categories, so use it as a guide to give you an overall picture of what sections of the community may be missing.

	Volunteers		Trustees	
	male	female	male	female
Have disabilities				
Are from BME groups				
Young people under 25				
Full time employed				
Retired				
Are from the LGBT community				
Single parents				
Have mental health problems				
Unemployed				
Asylum seekers				
Ex offenders				

When this is completed, you’ll be able to see where the gaps are (if any) and where you could target your recruitment. (See the separate publication on where to find volunteers for a comprehensive list). However, just because you don’t have any single parents, doesn’t mean you have to go and find them just for the sake of being able to tick some more boxes. You are looking for people with the right skills/experience, rather than people from a certain group.

However, you may want to target a particular group if the following example applies. Say your clients are older people and you want to take them out for some gentle walking sessions.

A volunteer who uses a wheelchair may be able to advise you on some of the best places to go as they could have experience of uneven footpaths, obstacles etc., that you would want to avoid.

## Barriers

So let’s say you want a more diverse range of volunteers. Here are a few barriers that people may face about becoming volunteers. Would any be applicable to your organisation?

1. You only offer voluntary work during the day and I work full time.
2. Your work is in the evenings and I have childcare problems.
3. I don’t speak very good English.
4. I don’t drive.
5. I don’t have the right skills.
6. I’ve got a criminal record.
7. I can’t afford to volunteer.

And some possible answers!

1. Could you offer them one-off opportunities or things they could do at home or in the evening?
2. Is there anything they could do during the day, or again at home?
3. Could you offer them something where language isn’t that important such as involving them in group activities until their English improves.
4. If public transport isn’t an option, could one of your other volunteers, or staff members with a vehicle, pick them up? Or maybe they could help you with something they could do from home.
5. Just a chat with them will reassure them that any skills needed for the job can be gained through the training you provide.
6. This of course depends very much on the nature of their criminal record and their flexibility. Many may want to work with clients, when this isn’t appropriate. So suggest something that could use the skills they have.
7. Reassure them that they will not be out of pocket and that you will cover their travel and meal costs when volunteering. Pay in cash on the day they volunteer, not wait until the end of the month and pay them by cheque as I heard one organisation do. Also, confirm that you will provide any necessary equipment and postage and telephone costs (if working from home). If they are on benefits, again reassure them that these are not usually affected by volunteering. However, there are various guidelines for each benefit, particularly Job Seekers Allowance, so they will need to check with the Jobcentre before committing themselves.