

4.9 Volunteers

You can't have a volunteering project without volunteers so it is worth putting a bit of thought into how best to find and keep them. The better you do both of these the more likely you'll get lots of committed volunteers.

Finding Volunteers

Before you start think about why people want to volunteer. This will help you target your advertising better by e.g. showing them what they will get out of the volunteering on your leaflets and posters. The main motivations are:

- ★ Making friends
- ★ Learning new skills
- ★ Using existing skills
- ★ Get work experience/CV
- ★ To make a difference
- ★ To help them in their course e.g. French
- ★ To learn about refugees
- ★ They are passionate about a cause
- ★ To do something fun and interesting
- ★ Their friends are doing it

Don't forget to think about the kind of volunteers you want. Are you looking for specific skills from your volunteers e.g. language skills, ESOL training or do you need more guys to help out at a youth group. Think about where you could advertise to get the kind of volunteers you want - this could be specific courses or other societies or clubs.

Try and be inclusive and don't just ask your friends, give other people the chance to get involved and the project will benefit from more skills, different ideas and life experiences.

Some tips on what your advertising should cover....

Why should they volunteer, why is their help needed?

- ★ Explain what need the project meets – why does it exist, what is the issue?
- ★ What difference will they make?
- ★ How does it benefit people – you could use quotes, life stories, video testimony from staff and participants
- ★ Why are volunteers important – e.g. no funding so can't run without them

What exactly is the volunteering role?

- ★ Give a clear description of the volunteering activity – writing a role description can be useful and be clear if you are looking for volunteers with specific skills
- ★ To show people what is involved you could use photos, show a video or get current volunteers/service users to talk about the project. You could also offer a taster session at the volunteering project so they can try it out.

Reassure potential volunteers that they can get involved

- ★ Make it clear if no previous experience is necessary and training will be given
- ★ Make it clear that the opportunity is open to all students

Tell them how they will benefit

- ★ What kind of new skills will they learn
- ★ Can help them with their studies e.g. practice French, teaching experience
- ★ Useful for CV
- ★ Highlight any social activities and how much fun it will be!
- ★ Use quotes from current volunteers or get them to give a talk

Different methods of advertising

- ★ Posters and flyers
- ★ Displays
- ★ Stall at freshers fair, outside the library or student union.
- ★ Organise an open day at the volunteering project
- ★ Organise talks from project staff, beneficiaries, volunteers at university events or at lectures
- ★ Adverts on university newspaper or radio
- ★ Use the volunteering department at your university if you have one – they can have a huge number of people registered with them so this can be one of most successful ways to get in lots of volunteers with very little work for you.
- ★ Events during e.g. Student Volunteering Week

Poster and leaflet tips - don't forget to:

- ★ Keep it clear and concise
- ★ Make it easy to read- no jargon
- ★ Eye catching
- ★ Give contact details
- ★ Where and when
- ★ Be clear about the next step e.g. e-mail, come along to meeting

Keeping Volunteers

Here are some tips to help your group hold on to volunteers:

Be clear about what the volunteering project is from the start.

People are much more likely to be committed and reliable if they know exactly what they are signing up to in the first place.

- ★ Ask your partner project for a role description for potential volunteers or you could make one yourself. This should tell them very briefly
 - What the activity is and when it happens,
 - Who is the project for
 - What need the project meets and why it is important.
 - How do they get involved and how quickly can they start volunteering? Is there an application form? Do they need to wait to have a CRB check?

- What time commitment is expected from them and why e.g. important for young refugees to have continuity, it takes time for volunteers to gain trust of refugees, we need lots of volunteers every week or we can't run the session
- ★ Give them a taste of what the project is like so they can see if it definitely something they want to do before they make a commitment. You could...
 - Get the project staff/participants to come to a meeting and give a talk
 - Arrange a visit to the volunteering project
 - Run a volunteering taster session where they can try it out for a few hours

Make new volunteers feel welcome

This is very, very important! A friendly, fun atmosphere is what will make people want to come back for more.

- ★ Be friendly
- ★ Introduce new volunteers to project staff, volunteers and participants
- ★ You could organise a social for all the volunteers so they can get to know each other

Make new volunteers feel prepared for their volunteering role.

If they know why they are there and how they can be useful it will seem like a worthwhile use of their time.

- ★ Provide some kind of introductory session or meeting - your partner organisation should provide induction training but it might also be a good idea to do something yourselves so all new volunteers know what STAR is and why we volunteer. It doesn't have to be complicated or formal. You can do it at a group meeting or just have a chat with new volunteers when they start. A good induction (from a partner organisation and/or STAR group) should cover the following:
 - Introductions
 - Show them the around the volunteering venue – make sure they know where toilets/kitchen etc are
 - Background info on the project
 - Background information on STAR
 - What their role will be
 - Who they should go to if they have any problems or questions
 - What to do if they can't attend
 - Useful topics – e.g. basic asylum info, working with children (you can ask STAR national or your partner project if they can run a training session)
 - Policies - ask your partner organisation if they have policies that volunteers should know about e.g. child protection policy, health and safety policy, volunteer policy, expenses policy or confidentiality policy
- ★ Buddying – you could match new volunteers up with more experienced volunteers who can tell them what they need to know about the project, the role and help them get settled in.

Be supportive of each other

Volunteers will vary hugely in the amount of experience and confidence they have. Creating an atmosphere where volunteers feel comfortable asking for help and sharing their concerns will make for happy volunteers!

- ★ If you see someone is struggling or doesn't know what to do – ask if they are ok and give them a hand!
- ★ Your partner organisation should be providing volunteers with support but if you feel that you need more support let them know. You could ask them to have regular group support meetings with volunteers.
- ★ Make sure everyone knows who they can go to if they need help or are concerned about something.
- ★ Hold regular volunteer meetings of your own so that people have the chance to get to know each other and talk about how the project is going.

Be organised

This will save so much time in the long run. It will ensure that everyone knows who should be doing what and when, and also deal with problems as they come up! Here are some suggestions...

- ★ Elect a volunteer coordinator/s and agree what their responsibilities will be.
- ★ Make sure all new volunteers have the information they need. Do they need a map or directions to get to the project? What time should they arrive? Who do they ask for? Can they claim travel expenses?
- ★ Make sure that you have all the volunteers' contact details – check with them that it is ok to share their e-mail address/phone number with the other volunteers
- ★ Make a rota
 - Do this at the start of each term to make sure you have enough volunteers for each session. A list of back up volunteers and their contact details is also really useful.
 - Make sure everyone has agreed to the rota and has a copy.
 - If a volunteer's name is on the rota and they can't attend then make it clear that they need to let the volunteer coordinator/project know and be responsible for trying to find a replacement by contacting the back up volunteers.
 - Are there a minimum number of volunteers you need to run the session? Always try to have a few extra on the rota so that if someone can't make it the session can still run.
- ★ Text/phone/e-mail volunteers before each session to remind them
- ★ Have regular volunteer meetings – this will give everyone the chance to get to know each other, agree the rota, discuss any problems that have come up and get involved in making decisions.

Make everyone feel part of the project

If volunteers feel that they have a role in shaping a project they will be more likely to feel responsible for ensuring it continues e.g. turning up when they are supposed to!

- ★ Try and involve everyone in any decisions that are made

- ★ Ensure everyone knows why the project exists and why volunteers are important
- ★ Keep everyone up to date with what is happening with the project
- ★ If you are evaluating the project make sure you ask everyone what they think

Make sure everyone who volunteers knows how important they are and what a difference they are making.

If volunteers feel like what they are doing really matters you'll keep them interested...

- ★ Share any positive feedback you get from participants or partner projects
- ★ Ask your volunteering partner organisation to chat to the volunteers about the impact their work is having
- ★ Evaluate the project and share the information with everyone (ask STAR national for advice on different ways to do this)
- ★ Have a volunteer awards ceremony
- ★ Arrange a volunteer social/party
- ★ Say thank-you!

Giving people credit – getting official recognition for volunteering

Volunteering can make a huge difference to your life and it's down to you to make the most of it! In today's world you need to show that you are more than the sum of your paper qualifications. You need to show future employers that you have initiative and can communicate and solve problems outside of the academic world. Here are some suggestions of how to show them the great stuff you have done with your volunteering

Accredited awards

There are lots of different kinds of volunteering awards you can work towards. Some awards count how many hours of volunteering you do and others might be a thank you certificate once a year. There are also some schemes which could count towards your studies.

The best place to start is to find out about what your university offers. So get in touch with your student union or student volunteering hub, your partner organisation might also have an awards scheme so ask them as well.

Vinspired and MV

The most common award is through the [Vinspired](#) programme (England) and MV programme ([Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#)). Although these programmes are slightly different depending what part of the country you are in, they are linked and you should be able to transfer hours between them. Many universities are linked up with these award schemes.

Vinspired and MV are nationally recognised awards for 16-25 year olds. The awards recognise the time you commit through logging the number of hours you do, the skills you develop and the difference you make through your volunteering.

Getting references

Its always useful to have people you can ask to be a referee if you are applying for a job in the future. Ask your volunteering partner organisation if you can use them as a reference – you could ask them to fill out a simple form or ask if they are willing to be used as a reference on future applications volunteers make. References take time to do so only ask if you have volunteered with an organisation for a reasonable amount of time and you know they know who you are and what you have done.