

Leading your Volunteer Team



Finding it hard to get committed volunteers?... Lots of volunteers turning up once and not coming back? Or is your STAR group thinking of starting a volunteering project and would like to know how to go about involving volunteers?

Here are some tips for STAR Volunteering Coordinators.

1. 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, takes time for volunteers to gain trust of clients, 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

2. 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

3. Make sure people feel prepared for their volunteering role

If they know why they are there and how they can be useful it will be 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 also a good idea to do something yourselves. Don't worry 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. Here are the basic things that should be covered...
 - Introductions

- Show them the around the volunteering venue – make sure they know where toilets/kitchen etc are
 - Background info on the project
 - 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.

4. Be supportive of each other

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

- ★ 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 project should be providing you all 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 get the chance to talk about how the project is going and raise any concerns they have.

5. 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!

- ★ Elect a Volunteer Coordinator/s and agree what their responsibilities will be. Some of the main tasks will be...
 - Recruiting new volunteers
 - Keeping in touch with the partner project
 - Organising introductory sessions for new volunteers
 - Organising volunteer meetings/socials
 - Organising training
 - Making a volunteer rota
 - Keeping in touch with the volunteers
 - Planning evaluations of the project
- ★ 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. They should also 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 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.

6. Encourage all volunteers to feel part of the project

If everyone feels that they have a role in shaping a project they will be more likely to take responsibility for ensuring it continues e.g. turning up when they are supposed to!

- ★ Try and involve everyone in any decisions that are made
- ★ Keep everyone up to date with what is happening with the project
- ★ Ensure everyone knows what need the project meets and why volunteers are important

7. 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 partner project 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!