

Supporting and Supervising Volunteers

Voluntary Action Islington

Understanding how effective support can enable both the organisation and volunteer to learn and grow.

- Explain how organisations can support their volunteers effectively.
- Explain how developing volunteers benefits the individuals and the organisation.
- Explain how organisations can provide effective learning and skills development for volunteers.

www.rebeccatully.co.uk

Supporting volunteers on a day to day basis

All volunteers require support

- to learn tasks
- to stay motivated
- to deal with difficult situations

The level of day-to-day supervision they will need will vary depending on

- the volunteer
- their experience
- the tasks they will be doing.

A framework of support and coaching utilising all staff and volunteers

- saves time
- avoids difficulties in later supervision.

- **Spend time selecting and recruiting appropriate volunteers.**

It is important to ensure there is a good match between the volunteer and the organisation. Volunteering should be an exchange. Whilst the volunteer offers skills and labour, the placement should fulfil their personal needs and motivations. Not every role suits every volunteer and this should be established as soon as possible.

- **Offer good induction and training**

It is important to invest appropriate resources to ensure that volunteers receive adequate training. If not you may find that the volunteers that you have recruited are inefficient, unhappy, or simply leave the project.

Induction is important because it helps to welcome new volunteers into your organisation and make them feel comfortable, part of a valued team, and confident in their work. You can also check that they have correct information about rights and responsibilities, and about the policies of the organisation.

- **Give task descriptions**

Task descriptions are particularly useful as they ensure that volunteers know what their role and tasks are. They can be empowering for volunteers, as they can increase a sense of confidence. They are also useful for managers, as they can create a constant list of things to do.

- **Give clear instructions and set boundaries**

After taking on volunteers, make sure that you clarify your future expectations. You should ensure that the new volunteer knows the boundaries of their role and what they can expect from the organisation.

- **Consider using a Volunteer Agreement**

A Volunteer Agreement is simply a description of the arrangements made between your org and the individual volunteer in relation to their voluntary work. It is often seen as a supportive document, which assures the volunteer of the organisation's commitment to making their volunteering experience a worthwhile, productive one. NB. Make sure that you differentiate between this and an employment contract as the latter is a formal, binding agreement which this is not.

- **Agree goals together, and keep a note of achievements**

Goals are personal and vary hugely between different volunteers. The volunteer will feel that they have a reason for being with your organisation, and you will have something to go back to in more formal supervision, or when there are difficult situations, or when you feel you'd like to reward and thank volunteers. It will also make references easier to write.

- **Ensure there is a named supervisor/ contact and that a replacement is available to cover annual leave and sickness**

It is essential that volunteers know who to go to with any questions and problems. This information should be included in a volunteer's induction programme, when they should meet in particular their immediate line manager and also any key members of staff and other volunteers with whom the volunteer will be working with.

- **Allocate more experienced volunteers to coach and support newer volunteers**

Many of your volunteers will have a mass of experience and knowledge of your organisations' processes and will see what goes on from a volunteer's perspective. Consider using this to ensure better supervising day to day while making it clear that volunteers can still come to you if necessary. Many volunteers will appreciate experience in supervising.

- **Agree what kind of more formal supervision will happen, how often and when**

Supervision involves regular time set aside for the volunteer to meet with their manager. This is particularly important for volunteers who carry out emotionally-demanding work

- **Be clear about your availability – open door or set time**

It is of course important to be around for volunteers to ask you questions or discuss problems on a day to day basis and not just to give them a day's work and disappear. However, it is also very important to be clear about your availability so that they know when they can approach you.

You may want to have an open door policy or you may find it more appropriate to set aside certain times of the day. It is often a good idea to set boundaries at the start so that volunteers are clear when you are and when you are not available.

Goal Setting

Setting goals is important for anyone. The goal may be simply to have fun – it's still a goal, and if you don't monitor this as an organisation you'll lose the volunteer. However – all volunteers have different motivations, and roles vary immensely. How do you make sure you keep track of the goals your volunteers have in an equal and easy-to-manage way?

Think about the following tricky situations...

How would you adapt the Volunteer Plan and Experience Record to suit a volunteer coordinator working with 100 very informal volunteers who turn up once in a while to help clear a particular part of the River Lea?

Imagine this: an organisation has started a project with specific funding to involve volunteers, with some quite strict guidelines. The volunteer coordinator has set up a good system of induction and it's going well. It is however creating a tension between the 'new' volunteers and the other volunteers who have been informally involved for many years. Many of the other volunteers were also involved in the creation of the organisation. How do you all work to create an equitable system of induction and goal setting?

Supporting Volunteer Learning in our Organisations

How we can notice where learning is happening, encourage it to happen and use it to the advantage of both our groups and the individuals that are part of them.

- **Think of something you learned while volunteering. How did you learn it?**
- **How does learning happen at present in your organisation? Think of the obvious, less obvious, informal and formal. There is every change that learning is happening, the trick is to notice this and be able to record it.**

The following tip are taken from the City and Guilds Volunteer Training Toolkit “**Roots to success: a practical guide to support volunteer-training in food growing groups**”.

Structure and Manage Volunteer Learning

Tips...	Where/ how does it happen?	Ideas...?
Encourage volunteers to learn from the tasks that they do.		
Be clear about the skills that volunteers can develop and about which skills are a priority to develop in your project		
Support learning on tasks through explanation, sharing techniques etc.		
Assign a “go-to” person, or people, to guide learning.		

Recognise and Measure Volunteer Learning

Tips...	Where/ how does it happen?	Ideas...?
Introduce a method of assessment that suits your volunteers and your project.		
Offer volunteers a course or programme that gives a clear structure for learning.		
Assess volunteers at the beginning and at the end of the course, and keep track of learning in between.		
Before volunteers have their final assessment, take account of what they could do next.		
Celebrate volunteers’ achievements.		

About the AQA Unit Award Scheme (UAS)

UAS has been offered by AQA as a recording of achievement scheme for over 30 years. It is a tried and tested means by which learners, no matter what their age or ability, can have their achievement formally recognised.

UAS can help learners with progression to

- further study
- training
- employment
- independent living
- more active involvement in society.



UAS is shown to motivate, encourage, engage, support and raise self esteem and can reward achievement which might otherwise go unrecognised, eg small steps or non-mainstream subjects.

Many different organisations use UAS including mainstream and special schools and colleges, pupil referral services, prisons, charities, training organisations and housing associations.

How does UAS work?

Every centre must have a trained Co-ordinator who runs and is responsible for UAS.

Each UAS unit clearly sets out what the student has to do to achieve and the evidence needed.

There is a huge bank of units for you to use or amend, or you can write your own.

A responsible adult teaches the unit.

AQA monitors evidence by checking this against the unit.

Certification

Each time a unit is achieved, a Unit Award Certificate is issued. This lists all the outcomes, ie all the knowledge, skills and/or experiences completed as detailed on the unit.

Certificates are usually issued promptly within 10 working days. They don't show a level - UAS is not a qualification - but instead show the detail of what the student has achieved in completing the unit.

They provide a great talking point for the learner about what they've done, eg during an interview for a college place or employment.

Links with AQA qualifications

You can use UAS to accredit individual units in AQA's English, maths and science ELCs, and PSE specifications.

UAS can help motivate learners, by using UAS as a stepping stone towards achieving a full qualification.

Browse the thousands of topics on the website. <http://www.aqa.org.uk/programmes/unit-award-scheme>

Supporting Volunteers in a Range of Ways Additions to Supervision

Drop-In

- It's flexible - you don't have to set aside hours or time each month
- It conveys an air of informality and is unthreatening
- It doesn't impose supervision on volunteers who don't want it

Scheduled Appointments

- You ensure you see every volunteer a certain number of times each year
- You are less likely to be interrupted in a session
- You can plan your own time better
- It can help you to avoid crisis management
- Volunteers don't have to feel like they are asking for something
- One or two volunteers don't dominate all your time
- Volunteers feel they are treated equitably

Group Support

A good idea in some situations...

- More experienced volunteers can support newer
- Some volunteers will find this less threatening than a supervision session
- Can work well in situations where volunteers are all in the same role: befrienders, counsellors etc.

But not all!

- Unless you are a confident, skilled facilitator, it can be quite challenging to manage discussions around very difficult or contentious issues.
- Volunteers may need to discuss more sensitive problems in private
- It's harder to deal with inappropriate behaviour: dominating discussions, refusing to contribute to discussions, or consistently raising inappropriate/irrelevant issues.

Keeping people involved and informed

Social Events (days out and trips, coffee mornings, meals)

- Volunteers feel valued and supported, making more formal supervision easier and more genuine
- Volunteers can talk to you and others in a relaxed atmosphere
- You can then arrange times to talk later if issues come up

Information Sharing (notice boards, phone calls, emails, meetings, newsletters)

- Volunteers feel 'in the loop' of the organisation and needed.
- They will be aware of what's expected of them and what they can gain when they come to supervision

Recognition (Awards, certificates etc)

- Volunteers feel acknowledged and appreciated

Matching Learning to the Volunteer and the Organisation

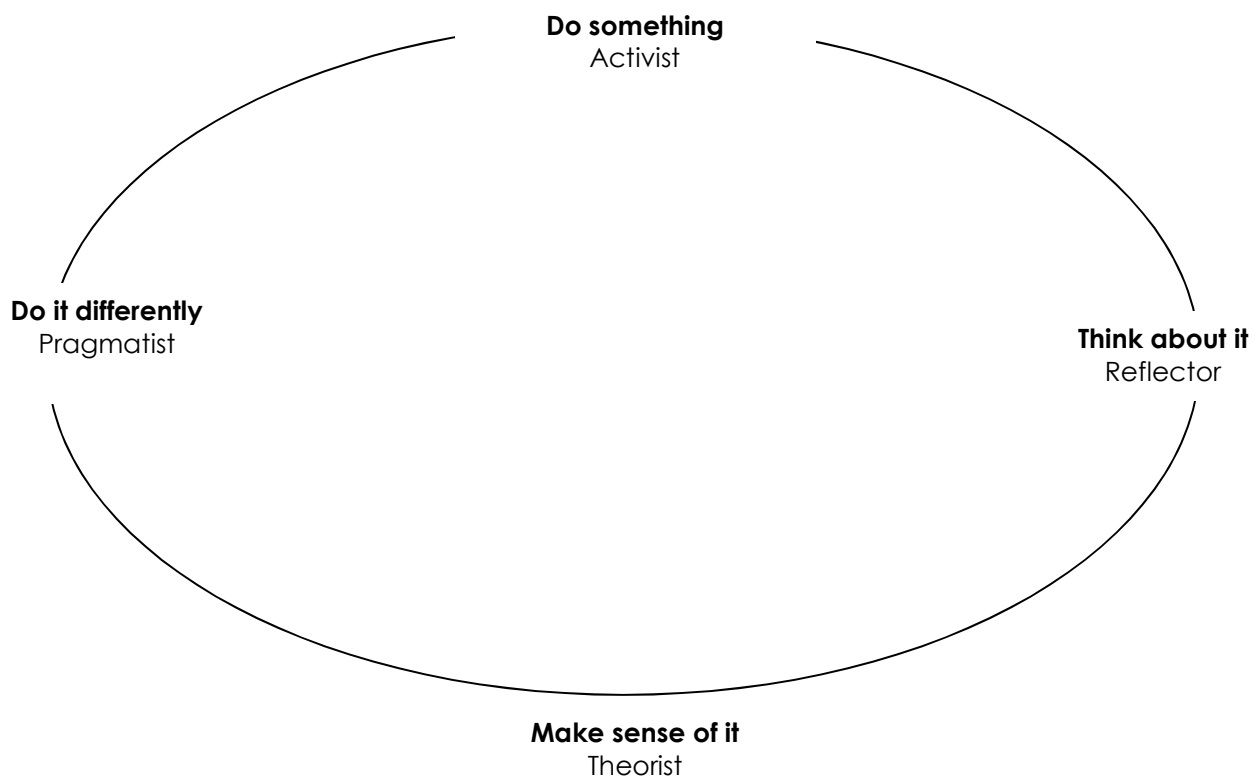
Learning and development needs of the volunteer must be tied in with the needs of the organisation. This is done by looking at the objectives of the organisation and identifying all the tasks that need to be undertaken to ensure they are met. You can then identify what training would be needed for each task.

This can then be used to identify the skills gap of your volunteers by looking at their existing skills and seeing how well they match those required of the task – the gap will be the basis of goals you'll set together. The skills gap will change over time, dependent upon the changing role of the task or the volunteer.

What opportunities do you have to assess the skills gap of your volunteers? Inductions, support sessions, informal chats and regular supervision?

Learning Styles:

Each volunteer will have a preferred learning style – activist, reflector, theorist or pragmatist. This is a theory devised by Honey and Mumford based on Lewin's learning cycle.



The preferred learning style can be ascertained by discussing with your volunteer learning experiences they have enjoyed in the past, and can then be matched with the various learning opportunities: coaching, mentoring, shadowing, reading or courses.

Supporting each other and ourselves – non-hierarchically

We all need support. The level varies, but we all need to feel valued and to bring issues from time to time.

Volunteer Co-ordinators rarely have time to support volunteers adequately, let alone themselves.

So...

How do we ensure those that need it have the support they wish for, including co-ordinators, and that we maintain motivation and retention at the same time?

Non-hierarchical structures:

Enable us to see all roles' 'value' as a more equal thing. It becomes more time-orientated, less financial.

Enable some people to stop feeling like they're on the 'bottom rung'. With certain volunteers, getting away from this kind of set-up will increase feelings of confidence and worth.

Make use of all existing skills for supporting volunteers, and nurture new skills.

Share support for volunteers between everyone, and therefore share responsibility for continuing volunteer involvement in the project too

As organisations and co-ordinators we need to be:

Clear with the roles we have – include support for others in tasks and have clear systems so support can be carried out by many.

Not just well-intentioned and welcoming but entirely committed to interaction that allows everybody to feel like that have a role to play and a stake in the outcome.

“For a non-hierarchical community to work the people in the community must actually be a part of the community. They are not participants, they are not recipients, they are not contributors. They are the community.”

Margins Project, Union Chapel London

SAMPLE VOLUNTEER SUPERVISION FORM

Name of Volunteer	Start Date	Role	Date of last Supervision	Date of Supervision
<p>In our last meeting/your induction, what did we decide you were going to do? <i>Summary of action points of last meeting or induction chat</i></p>				
<p>What have you been doing? <i>Summary of tasks, achievements</i></p>				
<p>What have you been proud of, enjoyed, has gone well? <i>Volunteer feeds back their thoughts</i></p>				
<p>What has gone less well, how would you do it differently? <i>Volunteer feeds back their thoughts and their own ideas of possible changes or developments. This is the point for the supervisor to challenge any problems</i></p>				
<p>What do you need from me? Targets, looking ahead, training <i>If you have action points, promise to do them and make sure you do! Make sure you both agree deadlines for everything</i></p>				
<p>When shall we meet again?</p>				

Support and Skill-Sharing for Co-ordinators

Co-ordinating volunteers is a skilled job, and often an isolated one. But - good news! Support to carry out your skilled role is more available now than it ever was.

Support and Networking for Co-ordinators

Volunteer management blogs: **VM Movement** and others have volunteer managers from all over the country – and the world – asking and answering questions that are relevant to you. <https://medium.com/@vmmovement> This includes “Thoughtful Thursdays” on both their blog and twitter, monthly (currently the second Thursday). You can also read and comment using **#ttvolmgrs** on www.twitter.com



Your local Volunteer Centre may have a face-to-face or online forum where you can get advice and – hopefully – have good snacks too. www.do-it.org has a list.



Good Practice in Volunteer Management: **NCVO** have a good practice bank: www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering

Volunteering England (before merging with NCVO) published a guide to support those who manage volunteers to gain support. It is not currently marketed by NCVO but is still relevant and useful. ***Influencing Up: A Guide to Gaining Executive Support for Volunteering and Volunteer Management.*** http://www.volunteering.org.uk/images/stories/Volunteering-England/Documents/influencing_up_web.pdf

Building your skills

Co-ordinating and Facilitating Groups

www.seedsforchange.org.uk/resources
<http://rhizomenetwork.wordpress.com/resources/>

Good Writing Skills:

www.plainenglish.co.uk

Making Writing Accessible for Everyone:

www.learningdisabilities.org.uk
www.mencap.org.uk
www.arcuk.org.uk