Knowledge Gateway

Practice Guidance and Information

Involving Disabled People and Carers

Top Tips for Supporting Volunteers by building a bridge to reach their ambitions of personal development, learning, volunteering and work.

Lead Scotland is a charity supporting disabled people and carers by providing personalised learning, befriending, advice and information services.

By reflecting on the following we would hope that these points would help you make your volunteering offer more inclusive:

Capture accessibility requirements from the beginning:

'It's important to embed accessibility within the structure of your volunteering process . Ask each volunteer about adjustments and preferences from the very beginning and ensure your communication and marketing is presented accessibly.' – *Barbara Taylor*

Be adaptive to circumstances outside your control:

'Covid-19 restrictions has actually been great for allowing volunteers to support from a distance: befriender volunteers that couldn't get out of the house before can now take part via the phone. Offer volunteers different ways to contact you and meet volunteers where they want as this benefits volunteers who live rurally.' – *Louise Andree*

'Harness the various expertise of people in your organisation to support the voluntee rs if they're having issues in other parts of their lives. For example, Lead Scotland has the expertise to signpost volunteers to educational support, social services and information about their rights if they're disabled.' – *Rebecca Scarlett*

Be aware of your volunteers' mental health:

'Covid-19 has had a huge effect on people's mental health. We increased the befriending element of our services in lockdown to respond to the increased isolation that many of our learners, befriendees and volunteers experienced.' – *Caroline Lindsay*

'Signpost volunteers to mental health and wellbeing resources lijke apps and tools as part of your regular engagement. It's important to make space available for talking about emotional wellbeing.' – *Rebecca Scarlett*

Individualise each volunteer's experience:

'Every volunteer has different skills and motivations. Get to know each volunteer and match them up with a role suitable for them, keeping in mind their goals. Also look for opportunities for virtual volunteer get togethers during the pandemic to keep volunteers who are shielding engaged.' – *Dawn Robb*

'If you're matching up volunteers with service users, take time to get the right fit in terms of skills, personalities and schedules. Keep an eye out for opportunities for further skills development and peer support amongst volunteers.' – *Barbara Taylor*

Include volunteers' feedback in organisational development:

'Volunteers are part of your organisation so should be involved in development. Give your volunteers lots of chances to feedback about their experience of volunteering and suggestions for the organisation in multiple, inclusive formats like in-person chats and online surveys.' – *Barbara Taylor*

'We adapt to the needs of each area we work in, even though we're a national organisation. We started doing telephone befriending after it was suggested to us by a volunteer in that area.' – *Louise Andree*

Appeal to everyone and advertise broadly:

'The most important thing to look for in your volunteers is that they understand your organisation's values and ethos. As long as they are committed, all volunteers can develop their confidence and communication skills. Don't be put off if someone is shy!' – *Dawn Robb*

'When advertising volunteer opportunities, use neutral marketing. For example, don't use images of only one gender or gendered language.' – *Louise Andree*

Need some more help?

If you would like more help or advice in relation to this guide, please contact us:

- **https://www.lead.org.uk/**
- Telephone: Volunteer Scotland 01786 479593
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The Knowledge Gateway is created and led by **Volunteer Scotland**

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This is a regularly reviewed resource. If you have any suggested updates, please email Volunteer Scotland at **hello@volunteerscotland.org.uk**