

Guide to

# Overcoming Barriers to Volunteering

## Overcoming Barriers to Volunteering

Education Institutions welcome a diverse population in to their doors each year, so it has never been a more important time to celebrate our diversity. Volunteering provides an opportunity for students to positively engage in our society bringing together diverse groups, creating cohesion and can provide a breadth of engagement activities for students from every walk of life. Student Volunteering England believes that all students have the right to volunteer and so in order to meet the needs of students, it's important we create diverse volunteering programmes that will meet the needs of the student body. It's important for us not to stereotype student volunteers

In this handout we'll look at the common ways to overcome barriers to volunteering and ways we can address these 'perceived' barriers. These are just some ideas that have been tried and tested but are certainly not exhaustive so if you have more ideas please send them in.

It's important to remember at all times how students will benefit from volunteering and that it is a worthwhile activity for them to engage in, since it will increase their employability, develop their CV and personal and work skills and provide social opportunities.

## **Common Reasons for not volunteering**

### **It's just not cool!**

Most students still perceive volunteering as going and helping at an elderly person's home. It's important students recognise that volunteering is more than just the traditional volunteering, so try and set up a range projects. There is always lots of interest in volunteering in the traditional sense but if you don't provide alternative opportunities too, then you are excluding a vast number of students from taking part.

### **No knowledge about it.**

Recent research suggests half of us would volunteer if we were asked. So it's all about asking people, no-one minds volunteering and 16-25 year olds come up as the people most likely to volunteer in the Home Office Citizenship Survey, although only 21% of them find out about this from their colleges<sup>1</sup>) Through marketing a project and asking each

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<sup>1</sup> Home Office Citizenship Survey 2005

volunteer to tell a friend,  
knowledge soon spreads!

**I don't have time...**

Students often have misconceptions about volunteering and think that they have to volunteer for a day or two a week, providing a range of opportunities that are flexible will help you engage students. Some volunteering starts from as little as an hour a week or even

**I don't have time (cont...)**

just a few hours a year if students are helping out on events. The key is to provide flexible volunteer placements that can fit around students' busy lives, one-off events are great ways to engage your busy students!

**I'm balancing a job and a course...no time...**

Whilst there is a genuine case for some students actually having no time, again this is an opportunity for students to get involved in a one-off event. Often students

balancing both a job and a course make good volunteers during vacation periods as they have spare time in their timetables.

**It's all working with people isn't it?**

A lot of people think volunteering is all about working with people, however not everyone is a people person so make sure you think about the diversity of volunteers when you are creating roles, this might mean creating a role to design a website for the project, having a role for a person to design the leaflets and posters for the project. Try to involve the volunteers in all aspects of the work, not just front line delivery. This will give your students a broad learning experience and give them ownership.

**I've got a disability so can't help...**

Use positive publicity that includes pictures of disabled volunteers and actively encourage that projects are set up from the start to provide for students with

disabilities. Apart from anything else, positively encouraging people to get involved by telling them they do have something to offer and their contribution would be valued highly often solves this problem.

**My English is bad so I can't help...**

Students who speak other languages can help in all kinds of ways. Examples are that the students might be able to help out with immigration or asylum seeker projects where languages other than English work to their advantage. In addition to this, volunteering is a great supportive environment for learning English and practicing learning. Set up volunteering so students with a lack of English can still contribute.

**I've not got the confidence...**

Volunteering is great for building students confidence and self-esteem but they will

need to get some help to take up a volunteer opportunity if they are not feeling very confident. Often positive encouragement and staff going along on a first visit can be the helping hand volunteers need.

**I've never done it before...**

Often students think they need to be older/or more experienced, to do a certain type of volunteering. Whilst some volunteering does require a certain level of experience, it's really important to provide the training within opportunities so that they can access it.

**Having trouble balancing course/lifestyle...**

If volunteers are having a problem balancing their commitments it's best to provide training in time management and pro-actively encourage them to access it, since learning how to juggle priorities and manage time will develop a lifelong skills. Alternatively a break could be offered to the volunteer with an option to return when the workload has subsided.

**Exams...**

The reality exists that students are very busy immediately before and during exam times, so it's best to plan volunteering projects to take part in the main part of term rather than in the middle of exams if you want as many volunteers to participate as possible. If your project adopts a placement approach, warning the organisation of term times and exam dates is important and asking them to be flexible to students needs at this time of year is crucial.

**Discrimination...**

Volunteers often fear discrimination, either from an organisation they've been placed with or a client. It is important to recognise the need for a equal opportunities policy that handles what to do when this arises so problems faced by the volunteer can be handled in a dogmatic and sensitive way. Students from minority backgrounds need to have additional support

measures in place to ensure they can access volunteering.

**Money...**

Students never have money and it is important that they aren't out of pocket through travelling to their volunteering or buying lunch whilst volunteering. All projects should include a fund for travel expenses and food expenses. Volunteering is a great way to try hobbies or activities without it costing anything.

**For help and support using this publication or further advice about how to set up your project, please contact Anna Day, Volunteering Development Officer on 020 7520 8927 or email [anna.day@volunteeringengland.org](mailto:anna.day@volunteeringengland.org)**

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We have made every effort to ensure that this Information Sheet was correct at the time of publication. It is intended as a summary of relevant issues and suggests further sources of information. Legal advice should be sought where appropriate.

For more information on managing volunteers, please visit  
The Good Practice Bank at [www.volunteering.org.uk/goodpractice](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/goodpractice)

All of Volunteering England's Information Sheets are available at:  
[www.volunteering.org.uk/information](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/information)

## **Volunteering England Information Sheet**

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Or please contact Volunteering England Information Service

Email: [Information@volunteeringengland.org](mailto:Information@volunteeringengland.org)

Freephone Information Line: 0800 028 3304 (M-F 10.30-12.30 & 14.00-16.00)

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