Developing your people

Learning from the Volunteer Management Traineeship Project 2013-2017

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Image: Trainee Richard Bunn with volunteers at Anglesey Abbey
Introduction

Who is this report for?

If you are involved in setting strategic direction, want to develop your people and improve the way volunteers are involved in your organisation or place this report is for you.

Why is it important?

People are at the heart of our organisations and developing their confidence and capability ensures we can deliver our ambitions.

The way that we involve, support and manage volunteers directly impacts on their ability to support and champion the cause of our organisations.

‘There is loads of learning from this project, not just about how we train volunteer managers but also in really important areas like how we attract more diverse staff and volunteers, how we work in partnership with other organisations, how we support the development of our people generally. Regardless of whether you were involved in the project there is useful stuff here for you.’

Helen Timbrell,
Volunteering & Participation Director, National Trust

Image: Director Helen Timbrell talking to volunteers
Project overview

The Volunteer Management Traineeship Project tested the merits of a structured, accredited, training programme for volunteer managers.

This entry-level programme recruited 17 full-time, paid, trainees who spent 18 months at a variety of National Trust places around the country, including historic built properties like Tyntesfield and outdoor places like the White Cliffs of Dover.

What can it offer you?

Its legacy is a range of insight data, lessons learnt and resources that cover the following:

- Inclusive and creative recruitment
- The benefits of support networks
- The impact of dedicated volunteer management roles
- The importance of great leadership
- The value of accredited training
- Diversifying your volunteering opportunities

Follow the links within this document to download additional resources, and the full project evaluation report.

‘The highlight for me was being able to see things I’d implemented happen at my property, and being able to see new initiatives changing other people’s lives for the best. I was particularly proud of the Youth Ranger group I set up.’ Alice

‘We really wanted to diversify our volunteering offer to attract residents from the surrounding housing estates. Working in partnership allowed us to reach some excluded groups that we would not ordinarily be able to access alone.’ Graeme

‘I’d heard of the National Trust obviously before, but I didn’t know the work they did or anything. I wanted a way into the sector. Not heritage, the third sector in general. I wouldn’t feel comfortable leaving my family and I wouldn’t have applied to do it if it wasn’t local. It was just a really good opportunity.’ Sadia
Recruitment

Insight Summary

The project aimed to ensure recruitment was inclusive for ‘entry-level’ roles, encouraging a diverse range of applicants to reflect local populations and offering creative application and interview processes. These included submitting short films and taking part in group activities.

50% of trainees were attracted by the ‘no experience necessary’ approach to recruitment.

61% of trainee applicants and shortlisted applicants were BAME or Youth 16-25

56% of trainees were BAME or Youth 16-25

Lessons learnt

1. The right recruitment language, application processes that offer different ways to communicate and engaging with partnership organisations who have existing relationships with your target audience can significantly increase your chances of success.

2. Understanding your local population demographic will help you develop a realistic plan for your diversity targets and ensure it doesn’t become a tick box exercise.

3. Recruitment doesn't need to be costly if you use social media and local promotion in partnership with others.

4. Ensure your organisation has clear processes and procedures in place to support the line management and integration of team members from minority groups. Involve minority group representatives in reviewing and developing these.

Resources to support you

Download our handy resource pack which includes the following; sample recruitment materials, assessment centre activity pack, working with partnership organisations for recruitment guide.
Support networks

Insight Summary

The project involved volunteer buddies and specialist mentors to support the trainees development. These support networks could be equally successful for a range of other specialist roles at different levels.

38% of volunteer mentors were from external organisations which brought a valuable external perspective to the trainees and wider National Trust.

Volunteer mentors contributed 714 hours of their time, equivalent to £33,320 of skilled time*.

Involving your current team members in Buddy or Mentor roles can build skills and confidence in your existing team. 62% of mentors and 88% buddies were motivated to get involved to develop their own skills and experience.

Lessons learnt

1. As well as providing great opportunities to bring in external talent these types of roles provide great development and confidence building for your existing people.

2. Clarity about what the role entails and confidence to select the right people with the skills, experience and network of contacts needed by the person they are supporting will ensure mutual benefit for both you and the volunteers involved.

3. Just because your volunteer mentors are specialists in their field doesn’t mean they may not need or appreciate some training to develop their mentoring skills.

Resources to support you

Download our handy resource pack, which includes example buddy and mentor volunteer role profiles, training plans, mentoring templates and a top tips guide.

*I calculation based on HLF in-kind contribution hourly rates for professional labour.

‘I found our six week catch ups very useful, discussing my work so far and setting targets for my future development, helping me to make real progress.’ - Trainee
Volunteer management roles

Insight Summary
The project gathered data about the impact of having a dedicated volunteer management role within a team, rather than an add-on or part of a wider role.

67% of volunteers felt the role improved their volunteering experience. 589 volunteers, across 16 properties, took part in the survey.

The National Trust’s annual volunteer survey measures progress against key performance drivers such as Leadership, Engagement, Empowerment, Culture and Values, Voice and Communication.

All 16 places involved had a rise in one or more survey drivers over the life of the project. In 2016 there was an average increase in 4 drivers per property.

The National Trust’s annual staff survey measures staff confidence in managing volunteers. During the life of the project confidence increased amongst staff at all properties involved.

Lessons learnt
1. Where conditions are right within an organisation or place a dedicated volunteer management role can make a positive difference to volunteer involvement, both for volunteers and other staff.

2. Leadership buy-in which supports, enables and champions good volunteer involvement is critical to ensure any dedicated volunteer management role can make sustainable impact.

Resources to support you
Download our handy resource pack which includes a guide to building a business case for dedicated volunteer management roles.
Leadership

Insight Summary

We selected host places based on their ability to support and enable the traineeship to be a success, this included having buy-in from the General Manager.

Where the leadership remained consistent during the life of the project trainees and volunteers rated their experience as more positive.

Lessons learnt

1. Those in leadership roles need support and training to enable them to understand the volunteering culture of their organisation, and empower their teams to make great volunteering happen.

2. Introducing this support early on, as part of a leadership induction can ensure volunteer involvement is considered from the start.

Resources to support you

Download our handy resource pack which includes an example Leadership in Volunteering induction resource.

‘The role of the leader can make and break the success of the volunteer culture and of the way that volunteering is seen. It’s not just about staff and volunteers it’s about our people.’

General Manager
Training

Insight Summary

The project tested the value of accredited training for volunteer managers.

In the future, strategic accredited training could improve standards across the sector, both in volunteer management and in the recognition of volunteer management as a profession. The backing and leadership of a professional body would support this.

All trainees successfully completed their accredited training, with an average mark of 78/100 for each assignment.

Lessons learnt

1. Accreditation cannot take the place of on the job experience and needs to be carefully implemented to avoid overcomplicating the training process.

2. Combined training and on-the job experience, cohort learning and a clear framework for training are all success elements of the accredited training, but could be delivered without accreditation.

3. Aligning selected course modules with strategic priorities will deliver greater impact.

4. Evidence suggests that accreditation currently serves the needs of the sector more than it does the National Trust and a professional body has a role to play in championing this.

Resources to support you

Download our accredited training evaluation and recommendations and training resource pack containing the ILM Level 3 Certificate in Volunteer Management facilitation plans and learning journals we used in this project.

‘We are happy to champion these recommendations and look forward to working with the National Trust and others to raise the profile, and practice of volunteer managers across the UK. The Association of Volunteer Managers is working towards becoming a professional body, developing clear career paths for volunteer managers.’

Debbie Usiskin, Chair
A. S. Maini, Vice Chair
Association of Volunteer Managers

Image: Trainees Karen and Keeley delivering a training event
Diversifying volunteering

Insight Summary

The project encouraged trainees to work with local BAME and youth audiences to co-create a range of appealing and inclusive volunteering opportunities at their host place.

We asked volunteers at the places where trainees were based to share their views.

Of the 589 volunteers who responded 48% felt the project attracted a wider range of volunteers to their place, including young people, and 30% saw an increase in the diversity of volunteers, including people from other ethnicities.

Lessons learnt

1. Understanding your local population demographic will help you develop a realistic plan for your diversity targets and ensure it doesn’t become a tick box exercise.

2. Ensure you have the ability to measure your progress. More flexible, ad-hoc and remote volunteering opportunities can need fresh thinking when it comes to gathering data if you usually rely on an annual volunteer survey or similar.

3. Don’t be afraid to try new things – you can learn just as much by things that go wrong as those that go right.

Resources to support you

Download our handy resource pack, which includes case studies from a range of trainees sharing their experience of developing new and more diverse volunteering opportunities, and a toolkit for involving young people in volunteering.
Explore our resources……

Our **handy resource pack** includes a range of useful case studies, how to guides and templates to support you, below are a few extracts of what you can expect to find.

**Case studies from trainees about develop diverse volunteering opportunities.**

**Mentoring resources to enable you to develop a volunteer mentor scheme.**

**Example and template recruitment materials.**

**Training materials, including resources for learners and for trainers.**