

A guide to collaborative volunteering

This following information covers; why sharing volunteers is a good idea, what to consider to make sure you collaborate successfully, and how Community First Yorkshire can support organisations wanting to work together.

Why sharing volunteers is a good idea

Over the last two years many charities and community organisations have explored new collaborations and ways of working. Covid has brought groups together with little or no notice or preparation, sharing common goals around the needs of their communities. Groups have supported and involved volunteers not just within their own organisation, but across whole areas and working with a number of others. This alongside developing and delivering new services such as telephone befriending schemes or virtual activities.

Sharing volunteers between organisations can offer lots of benefits, for organisations it can:

- enable the continuity and sustainability of services
- offer opportunities for the development of new or improved services
- solve problems and increase impact, by combining skills, resource and knowledge
- reduce the admin involved in welcoming volunteers into an organisation avoiding replication in areas such as DBS and reference checking
- provide an opportunity to learn and benefit from others knowledge
- increase sharing of information

For individuals volunteering with different organisations it can lead to:

- greater access to a wider variety of roles
- an opportunity to get to know their community and area better
- the exploration of different areas of interest
- varied situations where different skills can be used
- a wider social network

For many volunteers the opportunity to make a difference in their communities is really important to them.

Volunteer managers who facilitate collaborative opportunities are creating richer and more rewarding volunteer experiences. These experiences have a greater potential for meeting the needs and interests of each individual volunteer, in a way that may not be possible when volunteering with just one organisation.

A positive volunteer experience promotes loyalty and means more people are involved in making a difference in their local community, bringing about change and using their personal skills and assets.

How to collaborate successfully

Any group collaboration needs to be shaped by why, how and in what format it should take place. From the outset a shared purpose should be defined, with the realistic and honest setting of objectives including the management of expectations. Developing and maintaining trust between organisations, existing and new volunteers is important, as are clear working arrangements for the delivery of services, accountability and agreement around measurements of success.

Successful collaboration results from:

- both parties should have a connection to the purpose and people involved
- a clear purpose for project
- a shared agreement of the mission, strategy and values of the project
- a shared commitment to the creation of value within the partnership
- clear, open and honest communication between partners
- desire to continually learn and improve
- a shared and equal commitment to the partnership

In any joint working arrangement, once a clear purpose has been established, it is advisable to have a written agreement. That maybe a partnership agreement (or protocol), memorandum of understanding (MoU), service level agreement (SLA), contract or joint venture agreement.

The agreement should cover the following areas:

- Purpose of the agreement
- Activities covered
- Length of the agreement
- When and how it will be reviewed
- Roles and responsibilities of the organisations in relation to volunteers
- Who is responsible for decision making and finance
- Who has accountability
- How Communications will be managed
- GDPR, particularly storage and access to volunteer's data, and dispute resolution

Finally it is good practise to consult with, and involve existing volunteers to gain their perspectives on any shared volunteering proposals from the start. Volunteer insights can be a valuable resource when considering how an organisation develops and move forward in a post pandemic world. They are uniquely placed if volunteering with more than one organisation. As part of any shared volunteering proposals also consider what opportunities there are for volunteers to shape the development and delivery of services.

Sharing volunteers a volunteer's perspective

“What we've got to remember is they're not your volunteers. You are their organization.”
Karl Wilding NCVO

Very little research has formally been conducted on how volunteers feel about shared volunteers schemes however many people who volunteer for one organisation already volunteer for another. As a volunteer coordinator do you know where else they volunteer? Do you know what their experience is like - how do the two compare? Chatting to your volunteers and finding this is out is potentially a brilliant way of learning more about how the volunteer experience you offer is actually received by your volunteers.

Volunteer retention is no longer focussed on hanging on to people for as long as possible and being reluctant to let them leave. Good volunteer retention is about having flexibility. As they will be more likely to come back again to volunteering again in the future. We have to view volunteers as a community resource.

Passports Passporting and Volunteer Sharing

Passporting

Passporting and passports are two different things. Passporting for volunteers is about portability. The idea that volunteers can move more seamlessly between organizations. They do not need to have new DBS checks, new references a new application form each time they volunteer for a different organisation.

Passports

Passports are defined by the idea of validation. It is a volunteer-owned portfolio of what they have gained and achieved from volunteering.

It's something that volunteers can take between different organizations; a record or validation of everything that they've gained, achieved, and learned.

The idea that there is a pool of volunteers ready to be called upon is also problematic.

Volunteers want to volunteer – not wait until they are called upon, people do not want to be recruited to sit around and do nothing.

Volunteer sharing

A more practical approach could be volunteer sharing, its more informal than passports and passporting, driven by the needs of volunteer involving organisations, more community oriented. You should already have a relationship with other volunteer involving organisations in your immediate vicinity. You know what they need. They know what you need. It can make it easier for volunteers to move between different organisations, to move between roles in your own organization and to work collaboratively with other organisations.

How Community First Yorkshire can help

Community First Yorkshire are available to offer support and guidance to groups wishing to work collaboratively and share volunteers. We can provide support with the standardisation of policies and procedures and depending on your project needs we can also put you in touch with similar organisations. To request support with developing policies or anything else relating to volunteer coordination please complete one of our [enquiry forms](#)

We regularly facilitate a volunteer coordinator network meetings, the meetings provide a space for volunteer co-ordinators from across North Yorkshire to network and share information, advice, tips and thoughts on all aspects of volunteer management. TO find out more please visit our website [Volunteer coordinator network meeting](#)

Find out which organisations are active in your area and who else is interested in volunteering by following Community First Yorkshire on Twitter [@CommFirstYorks](#) and Facebook [Community First Yorkshire](#)

We also provide training on collaborative approaches to see all our upcoming training please visit our [training and events calender](#)