

Rural Wisdom

Tips for getting people involved



www.ruralwisdom.org

Why it matters

Lots of community groups are looking for more people to help them do what they have planned. It can be even more of a challenge for groups whose organisers and volunteers are older people themselves. It can also be more difficult for groups in rural areas when there are fewer people living nearby.

Some of the community groups we know through Rural Wisdom find that their volunteers leave, or are able to do less, as they get older. People have more commitments to their families, or they are away more, or they have health problems that mean they can do less than before. This can mean that more of the work in organising and delivering activities falls on a few people. This means the group is now looking for people to take on many tasks, while other people feel reluctant to take on such a big responsibility.

But lots of groups have found ways to make this situation less of a problem. These tips share what they have learned. These approaches may not be right for your situation, but we hope they will spark off ideas that you can develop and then in turn share with other people.

Thank you to everyone who has helped us develop these tips.



People and roles

We are talking about 2 types of roles here - formal volunteering and the less formal ways in which people give help to each other.

Formal volunteering is organised through a charity or community group or sometimes a public body like a health service. Examples include: coaching children in a sports club, befriending for people who need extra support, a driver for a community transport scheme for people going to hospital, and being on a committee that is responsible for what a group does.

- The roles are clearly defined and people are usually recruited to help in a specific way.
- The relationship between the volunteers and people getting support are often going to last for a while.
- People know that this is an important commitment.
- The volunteers will have interviews and training before they start work.
- There is a clear structure – volunteers know they have a manager for the tasks that they are doing (even if the group does not use that title) or it is clear that everyone shares the responsibilities.
- There is usually on-going training to enable volunteers to develop their skills and be good at what they do.
- Volunteers and their managers will have their own organisation's policies which build in good practice throughout their activities.

- In many situations the volunteers will be asked to provide information for a Police or other check, as part of ensuring that the people they are working alongside are safe.
- Roles can be made attractive to potential volunteers from all social or economic backgrounds as formally funded projects will nearly always offer volunteer expenses for travel and other out-of-pocket expenditure.

Informal volunteering is when we offer to help someone as ourselves, rather than through any organised project or scheme. Examples include clearing snow from a neighbour's path, helping paint the village hall, and baking cakes as part of fundraising.

- It is part of being a good friend or neighbour, and many people do not think of themselves as a volunteer in these situations.
- It often is a one-off activity, and if the situation comes up again the volunteers can decide each time if they want to do it.
- There is less of a longer-term commitment, although some people do this sort of thing for many years and do not want to let down their friend or neighbour.
- People rely on the day-to-day ways they make decisions on whether they trust someone to do that task – for example, welcoming any neighbour who will clear their path but only accepting help with things inside their house from someone they know better.

- This sort of low-level helping out often happens alongside more structured volunteering, and each complements the other.

There are good practice ways of building and valuing both types of volunteers. Many people find that both approaches have strengths and they can take ideas that come from both ways of people making a contribution to their community.

example

Pembrokeshire Good Neighbour Scheme

Good neighbour schemes provide easy access to help and support for all residents living in the community, if they need it. They help people with a wide range of situations.

- A small group of volunteers form a Co-ordinating Committee to oversee the running of the scheme.
- A bigger pool of volunteers are recruited from the community – these are people who are willing to help their fellow villagers in various ways.
- Each place has a Co-ordinator who takes the initial calls, works out who is best placed to help, and also is the link to other resources when needed.

example

Flintshire

The message in Flintshire is 'Be a Good Neighbour' – encouraging people to be aware of neighbours who could do with some help, such as when the path is not cleared in winter.

They have linked this to the message of 'Be Weather Aware'.

The aim is to help people be confident about what they can do themselves and know how to ask about more help when the person may need that.

Why do people volunteer?

There is a set of reasons that keep coming up when people are asked about why they choose to take on something that benefits other people. The mix for each person is different, and we can find that some aspects are more important for us at different times in our lives.

- A way to get or keep in touch with other people, including a way to find new friends.
- Fitting in, when that has been hard to achieve elsewhere.
- Having something to do, keeping busy.
- Wanting to help or benefit other people – seeing the impacts it makes for them.
- Caring about an issue or problem, such as wanting to improve the physical environment or wanting to make life better for a particular group of people. For

some people, this is about giving something back after they or someone they care about benefitted from the help of other people.

- Feeling part of something bigger, knowing that there are other people who are working to achieve the same outcomes.
- Part of gaining or keeping skills – this could be helping someone get experience that then gets them on to a training course or helps with job applications, or it could be someone wanting to keep on skills from an earlier work role, for example. There are also people who want to share the skills they have and pass these on to other people.
- Having a role, and sometimes wanting a role that is recognised and respected by other people.
- Wanting to make a contribution – people who have always volunteered in some way, and often come from a family or community where most people volunteer in some way.

We also look at how volunteer roles fit in with our own health and wellbeing, the other commitments we have and the other things that are important to us.

The reasons we volunteer matter when we think about what types of groups and activities we want to be part of, and what roles we are willing to take on.

It helps to remember that people volunteer for different reasons when we ask them to help.

- Someone who likes working on websites may offer to help with the website and social media for any

group in the community, but does not want to be a volunteer driver.

- Someone who wants to make life better for older people may be happy to take on any task to help a group run by people living with dementia, but is not so keen to help at a crèche.
- Someone who looks after their grandchildren after school may be keen to help with something that is on during the holidays, especially when it involves meeting other people in the local community, but is not able to take on any regular weekly role.
- Someone may be willing to start a crafts group for older people, but only if it does not get in the way of a craft club she already has with young people.

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I began when my neighbour offered both of us to help with the washing up when some of the ladies at the lunch group were having more problems with arthritis and the like. Now I pick people up, collect the food for the week and I'm learning all about the cooking. I like volunteering that is hands-on, very practical – keeps me busy and I can do something that someone else finds difficult. It's been a great way to meet people after I moved to the area.

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example

Community Action Plans

Lots of local areas are developing plans to help Councils and other public services plan ahead. Often there is legislation or guidance that says what has to be in the plan. But communities can have their own Action Plans too. They can also use the process for the formal plans to help them find people who are interested in things that benefit the local community and want to help make it happen.

This is the experience of the Marr Area Partnership working on a Community Action Plan:

“Throughout the process of questionnaires and feedback sessions, and through asking people what they could improve in their community, you start to have conversations about different aspects. Through discussion the participants will be drawn towards volunteering for causes they are passionate about.”

“I’ve had a lot of experience of different types of volunteering over the years. I find I like situations where everyone is equal, such as on a committee, rather than roles when one person is ‘helping’ another.”

Keeping going for current volunteers

Types of volunteer roles

It can help to be as flexible as possible about the ways people contribute to what you are doing. The current arrangements were introduced because that made good sense at the time – but circumstances can change and new arrangements can make good sense now.

Look at a range of smaller tasks rather than a few big ones.

- This makes it easier for someone to keep on part of what they do and let go of parts that are becoming difficult.
- It makes the group less vulnerable if one person has to reduce what they do or leave.

Think about short-term or one-off ways for people to volunteer, so volunteers who are now doing less than before can stay involved.

Share tasks between 2 or 3 people, rather than only one person doing the task, especially when it is a really key role.

- This puts less pressure on each person.
- There will always be someone to pick up a task if one person is unwell or suddenly has to spend more time on family commitments.

Practical help

Look at ways to make tasks easier for the volunteers – such as ways to move heavy pots at a lunch club, or buying phones for volunteers that are easy to manage when people have less strength and mobility in their hands

Build in extra expenses for volunteers to get the practical supports that help them continue as a volunteers, such as getting a taxi when they can no longer drive.

Look at some new volunteer roles that help your volunteers, such as someone who does an early round of lifts to get people along to set up for the club or event, as well as drivers who help participants and members get there.

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We pay for certain services that are difficult to get volunteers for, e.g. media or bookkeeping.

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How the project or service is organised

Look at the ways volunteers get opportunities to build their skills and confidence. Some people are more likely to stay involved if they are learning how to make the service better or are gaining new skills.

Have opportunities for people to learn new skills that will enable them to take on a different volunteer role – such as when everyone involved in a lunch club can get training on food safety.

Make sure it is easy for your volunteers to say that they would like to do something different, or with less or more responsibility.

Have regular ways for everyone to feed in their ideas on how the services you provide for the group as a whole can grow and develop.

Look at ways for volunteers to get training through other organisations and partners – this keeps them engaged and also benefits what you are doing.

Look for different types of volunteer roles, such as short-term or time-limited commitments.

Also think about what the members and participants can contribute – becoming volunteers themselves or taking on more of a peer role.

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We've found it has helped to ask people to help with time-limited tasks. People know they can back out at that point, although several people have stayed with us.

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example

Summer activities in East Renfrewshire

Traditionally many groups that rely on volunteers shut down over the summer holidays, partly because so many of the volunteers are on holiday.

Last year groups across East Renfrewshire asked both the people who come along to the groups and others who might get involved for ideas on ways to reduce social isolation and make it easier for people in the area to create more social connections. One of the gaps they identified was the summer holidays – there are lots of activities for children but nothing for older adults, and this can be a very lonely time when people don't see friends.

These are some of the ideas people suggested.

- A few groups that are nearby sharing activities – each doing something once over the 4-6 weeks when things stop, but members of all the groups knowing they are welcome at each place, with volunteers from across the groups each doing one week.
- Recruiting some volunteers just for the summer holidays, or even for part of the holidays.
- Trying something different, such as a book club, that needs fewer volunteers or that people can organise themselves.

Using your partnerships

Sometimes it can be good to look for a partner who might help to sustain an activity for much longer. If your initiative would otherwise rely on one key person to be there all the time, this can be really useful:

example

Games Corner at Milford Haven Library

The libraries in Wales are diversifying and are no longer places where you all read in silence or borrow a book and leave. These days, people can attend courses, carry out family research or look for jobs on the Internet. There are fun activities for young children and after school and holiday activities.

Milford Library does all these things and more. The team welcomed Volunteering Matters' first knitting group a number of years ago – the ladies have tea, read poetry, share life stories and laugh endlessly.

Rural Wisdom helped to expand the library's offer by establishing a second knitting group in response to growing demand and a Games Corner. The library is a safe, warm, friendly environment, where staff members are glad to see the knitters and scrabble players coming in. If the local organiser cannot be there, the library staff are on hand to make sure everyone is okay.

The groups are not charged to meet in the library. For the staff, this is part of a mutually beneficial relationship, helping to keep the libraries relevant.

Remind people how much they contribute and that they matter

Have thank you events for the volunteers when people can enjoy each other's company and not think about delivering the activities you provide.

Make sure that feedback from the people you support or who take part in the activities is shared with all the volunteers, so they know the impact they have.

example

TREE: The Regeneration of Eaglesham's Environment

TREE works to improve the physical environment of Eaglesham village. They have found that offering smaller volunteering opportunities is a good way to get more people involved.

- TREE offers volunteers a small bag of bulbs to plant. They do this quickly and can return for another wee bag to plant. In the same way, larger tasks can be broken down so that people are only doing a short-term task – like watering the planters for 1 week.
- Some volunteers don't like weeding or planting bulbs. They now ask if any of them could make a pot of soup for the other volunteers. The lesson is to ask people to do things that they feel they are good at.
- They involve young people through Duke of Edinburgh Awards scheme by offering to host a project for them to be part of.
- They are registered as an agent of the Saltire Awards – You give points to volunteers (young people) who build up hours. They can use the points to get items such as a first aid course training.

“It takes more work to co-ordinate it but you also have more volunteers you can ask to do other things.”

example

Healthy Valleys

Health Valleys hosted one of the Get Together sessions in Scotland.

This is the range of ways they support and value their volunteers, in addition to giving people their expenses.

- **Training** Offering both essential and additional training covering a range of topics.
- **Support and supervision** They have an 'open door' policy and provide varying degrees of support from 1:1 to group support.
- **Peer support** Bringing volunteers together to share challenges and successes.
- **Volunteer reward and recognition** such as group events, project events, newsletters, birthday cards – many ways for volunteers to enjoy being together, feel valued and have fun!
- **Award ceremonies** Looking for ways to have the volunteers formally recognised. This year Healthy Valleys' volunteers were awarded Volunteering Organisation of the Year by the Third Sector Interface (co-ordination body for the voluntary sector) for their Council area.

Drawing in more people

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There is no magic formula for attracting volunteers. It's about speaking to people, doing some presentations at groups, awareness raising in general.

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Be welcoming

Show that you like people as themselves, not just as potential volunteers.

Have events such as open days, or use Christmas/Halloween/Spring/Summer Fairs that welcome for everyone in the community, where people can just come along to enjoy themselves and find out more.

Find out what interests people

Listen to people to find out what is going to interest them and make them want to be involved in activities in your community.

- What are their hobbies and interests?
- What skills do they want to share and what do they want to learn?
- What do they hope to get from being part of the community?

Be open to what they bring, even when it is not something that has been part of what your group does until now.

Introduce people to other people and groups if that is where their interest lies. At some point in the future they may introduce potential volunteers to you.

Be flexible in what you ask people to do

Have some opportunities for people to get involved in that are easy to do and give them and you a chance to find out more about each other.

Use the informal volunteering/good neighbour roles and approaches to help you find people who want to do something to benefit other people.

Have opportunities for new people to learn about what your group does and how to be a volunteer. This can include courses and working alongside another volunteer.

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It helps to have set rules on how long each committee member can serve – with us, the President does 1 year or 2 at the most, other posts are for an initial 2 years with possible extension to a maximum of 6. That way there is a constant turnover and new members have the opportunity to lead while older ones can take a back seat but still work on sub committees. It also means people know there is an end-they're not there for life and it helps with succession planning.

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example

Caddonfoot Kurling Group

Caddonfoot is a very small village in Scottish Borders. Some older people and people with health problems wanted to do activities that brought them together and were enjoyable but didn't feel they could organise it themselves.

A worker at a community development project organised a taster afternoon which let people try activities they had asked about, such as crafts, and a few other things – including trying out an indoor kurling set borrowed for the day. The kurling was a great hit.

The Kurling Group started with a handful of people coming along once a week. Over the next few months more people started coming along and the members of the group took on more of the tasks of organising it. The group now organises it all themselves: one person opens up the village hall, someone looks after the equipment (as they now have 2 kurling sets of their own), someone picks up sandwiches from the local hotel, someone else organises the tea, and Lorna gathers in the money each week (to pay for the hall and extras) and keeps them under control. The biggest challenge is having a referee as some people are a bit too competitive.

At Christmas they had a challenge day with another kurling group at a village – there was a kurling Santa, an 80-year old Elf and lots of Christmas jumpers.

This summer they are planning kurling sessions with the village primary school, which some of the mums will help organise.

example

Milford Haven's Small Steps group

The Small Steps group was established after the first Rural Wisdom project meeting where around 30 people said they would like to be connected by email and can work for small committee-type groups or bigger networks.

Small Steps has been useful for sharing volunteering opportunities, invitations to meetings in Milford, Pembrokeshire and further afield, sending out documents to peruse or proof-read, as well as ensuring people access more general news, training or appeals for help from local people or groups.

A year later, the group has grown to 70 people. Members are encouraged to pass on any messages to their own networks and it is an effective way of sharing information with many people in the area.

Be flexible in how you reach people

The routes that work for your current volunteers might not work as well for other people. Think about how other people find out about what is going on in the area if they are not already going to places and groups. This is often a good way to also think about how to reach people who could benefit from what you do but who you are not yet reaching.

Ask your members or participants and your current volunteers to help.

Get people interested in the topic or the group before you ask them to become a volunteer.

Ask groups in touch with people who benefit from your activities, as they may know people who care about this issue and want to help.

example

Highland Perthshire's Welcoming Committee

Highland Perthshire is an area that people move to when they retire. They may know the place from many years of summer holidays but not yet have so many links with the community.

There is an informal network of local people who make a point of getting in touch with new people, especially those who are around retirement age and older. They say hello and tell them about local groups and where to find services. They offer to meet for a coffee, or lend them their equipment for cleaning the patio. They have found that's a good way for new people to become part of the community.

Many people start going along to local activities as members and soon they get involved in helping groups as another way to get to know people in the local community.



example

Healthy Valleys

Healthy Valleys have learned to adapt their marketing to reach different audiences.

The central point each time is to use case studies, video clips and real-life scenarios, so people see the impact and can see how the volunteers contribute to making this happen.

Some approaches that they find successful are: Facebook, posters and leaflets, community events, word of mouth, free sites such as Gumtree, and especially through existing volunteers.

Healthy Valleys have a range of different types of volunteering opportunities across their projects, including one-off events and other ways for people to get started.

They also support people who have used their services to think about volunteering as part of building their confidence and skills and moving forward in their lives.

example

We Care, Kinloch Rannoch

We Care is a group led by people living in Kinloch Rannoch and people who live round the loch or who use the shop and other services in the village.

They sent a survey to every house which asked both about the help people might like now or over the next year or so, and about what they could offer to help others in the community.

Many people who responded asked about help for themselves and offered to help neighbours – showing that volunteering to help and getting support often go together.

example

Pembrokeshire Good Neighbour Scheme

This scheme used posters designed by students in primary schools that went into shops, Post Offices, pubs and community notice boards.

When the scheme was getting going there were surveys to every house and sending information through routes such as local press and Tenants' newsletters, and presentations to a lot of community and professional groups.

Although the Good Neighbour Scheme runs across the county, each local scheme has its own publicity aimed at that community as well as benefitting from the area-wide publicity.

example

What's On, Milford Haven

This very local listing includes only local, community or low-cost activities to help people access groups, services and events more easily.

The experience of people in this areas is that very targeted local newsletters are great places to appeal for volunteers. For example, in one edition of What's On, an appeal for volunteer drivers was featured on the back of the listing, with one for ideas for Founders' Day on the front cover.

Show the impact people can make

People are more likely to get involved in groups when they know that they would be making a difference in people's lives and having an impact for that community.

Have lots of positive examples and images of the impact your group makes.

Ask people who benefit from what you do and volunteers to tell their joint stories, so people can understand the link between the volunteer roles and the benefits people get. You can do this without compromising anyone's confidentiality by not getting into personal details and making sure that everyone involved has agreed to it.

Ask your current volunteers to explain what they get from being part of your group. You are looking for all the range of reasons and benefits, to have the examples that will engage the range of people in the potential volunteers.

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When you get the permission of people to be photographed, ask for their permission to use the picture in your promotion. Then your images can become a great way to appeal to other volunteers and can also be used as tools to get funding.

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Committees

Committees are a special situation, as the people on a committee are responsible for the group and what it does. It is the role that many groups find it hardest to fill. But there can be more flexibility here than we often realise.

Think about having 2 people to take on roles such as Secretary and splitting up the tasks, if that makes it easier for some people to continue or for other people to take on the role.

Be more flexible about when and where the committee meets. There may be people who could be there if it met at weekends/evenings/a different day, for example.

Think about how the committee communicates among themselves.

- Establishing an email interest group is an easy way to share news, updates and minutes of meetings between face-to-face meetings, or sometimes instead of these when it is difficult for everyone to get together.

- You'll always need to be prepared to post out to people who are not on email, so have a stock of addressed envelopes to make this easier.
- It's also important to agree with everyone that no personal information gets shared amongst this group. Find out from your email group members whether they are all happy to see each other's email addresses – if not, simply 'bcc' every time you message.

When you invite or ask people to join a committee, reassure them that there is training and lots of support for people in the role – from the local Third Sector organisations, from other charities and community groups, and sometimes from people in Community Development and similar roles at the Council.

Ask current or previous committee members to say or write a bit on what they got from that role as part of your more general information for all potential volunteers and be around at events for volunteers and members, so people can ask them about what is involved.

Ask a committee of another group if one of their committee members will join you for 6 months or so, if that helps you out while someone is away for a while, such as during an illness. It gives that person time to recover and come back, or some time to find more committee members.



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