

Training, supporting and managing volunteers remotely

October 2020



Introduction:

This learning briefing is based on the experiences of staff in 6 different third-sector organisations, all of which have established volunteer programmes which needed to be adapted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Previously, all training and support happened face-to-face but now it's done remotely.

When planning for the shift to an online approach partners wanted to ensure that:

- Volunteers and participants continued to receive a quality service tailored to their needs
- New and existing volunteers were supported and retained
- An alternative was available for volunteers who weren't willing or able to get online

Volunteer recruitment:

Most partners use their existing information packs. After an informal Zoom or phone chat with a potential volunteer the documents are emailed or posted to them and 'signed' in a variety of ways - via an email confirming that the volunteer has read and accepted the information, or by printing out the sheets requiring a signature and posting or taking / emailing a photo of the signed documents.

Volunteer induction:

Carers Leeds host small group induction sessions on Zoom for all new volunteers. In advance of the session volunteers receive a workbook in the post. Staff prepared a powerpoint presentation which mirrors the workbook to facilitate group discussions during the induction.

Volunteer training:

Sporting Memories created a number of bespoke online training sessions for volunteers, including how to use all the features of a Zoom Pro account and how to adapt best practices of face-to-face clubs to create an online club. Each Zoom session is a maximum of 3 hours and there is a short break every hour. Attendee numbers are restricted to a maximum of 10 and 2 facilitators host each session. There's the option to join facilitated group telephone training sessions for volunteers who are not online. Sporting Memories also offer optional refresher training sessions for existing volunteers to help maintain their skills, commitment and confidence.

Carers Leeds regularly pays for high-quality training for their staff; during the pandemic this has moved online and volunteers are now invited to attend alongside staff. Carers Leeds uses a mixture of in-house and externally-facilitated training, all of which are available to volunteers.

Volunteer communication:

All partners noted the importance of keeping in touch with volunteers on a regular basis. The majority produce a regular volunteer newsletter to share organisational updates, new changes in response to Covid-19, training dates and other opportunities as a way to keep volunteers engaged. In addition, all partners arrange monthly Zoom meetings so that volunteers can meet and talk and often staff members keep in touch by phone, email or Zoom in between meetings.

Volunteer opportunities:

Organisations now offer a wider variety of volunteer tasks, all of which can be done online.

Volunteer support:

Age UK Leeds noted that some volunteers may require extra support during the pandemic, for example due to being furloughed, isolated from family, or coping with the changing restrictions. In addition, some telephone

befriending volunteers may need extra support to engage with their befriender in the early stages. This is because they haven't been able to meet and connect face-to-face before embarking on telephone befriending - something which would have been unheard of pre-Covid.

All partners agreed that regular contact and support is vital to keep volunteers engaged, motivated and involved. This is particularly important during the pandemic as restrictions change frequently and services often rely on rapid responses from retained volunteers.

Peer to Peer connections:

Sage created a WhatsApp group for volunteers to join if they wished. This provides an informal space for volunteers to connect, socialise and share banter. In order to comply with GDPR rules Sage workers ensure that volunteers understand that their phone number is visible to other members of the group. Sporting Memories encourages volunteers and participants to set up WhatsApp groups for their own clubs, without input from staff members. Carers Leeds set up private Facebook groups for volunteers to use to connect with their peers.

Volunteer management:

All partners continue to meet with volunteers for formal supervision, over the phone or via Zoom, in addition to more informal check-in calls. All partners build rapport with their volunteers and are available throughout the working week to address any issues which arise.

Further reading:

- [Volunteering in the pandemic \(Campaign to End Loneliness\)](#)
- [Telephone befriending information and resources \(Time to Shine\)](#)



