

cultural volunteer ©

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WELCOME!

cultural volunteer (cv) is a free e-news and information service for arts management professionals. **cv** is published six times a year and comes to you from Lynn Blackadder, of Arts People and Projects arts management consultancy www.lynnblackadder.com, specialising in helping organisations successfully involve volunteers. You can choose to read **cv** in email or as a Word attachment. I hope you enjoy **cv**, but if you don't wish to receive future issues, please return this email typing 'unsubscribe' in the subject line.

IN THIS ISSUE ...

This month **cv** gets philosophical, and **reviews current thinking on volunteering and civic renewal**. At a more practical level, we'll be looking at the **pros and cons of having volunteer agreements**, and finding out what all the fuss is about the **National Railway Museum's new volunteer advertising campaign**.

WHY YOU SHOULD READ **cv** ...

cv is for arts management professionals who currently involve volunteers in their organisations, and for those who don't, but would like to find out more about volunteers.

cv aims to raise awareness of the resource cultural volunteers represent, and how to utilise it effectively.

cv actively campaigns for the recognition and progression of volunteers working in arts organisations.

cv can help you to better understand the nature of volunteering and how it relates to your organisation.

cv will regularly bring to your attention useful information, resources and commentary on volunteering in the cultural sector. Experts on volunteer management will feature, and we will explore topics raised by you in future issues.

FEATURE: To what extent can volunteering bring about civic renewal?

This question is explored in a recent collection of essays entitled 'Any volunteers for the good of society?' published by The Institute for Public Policy Research (2002, ISBN 1860302009, £8.95). There are some acute observations made in two essays in particular (Victoria Nash and Matthew Thomson). Listed below are a number of points that will be of particular interest to those of you running volunteer and social inclusion programmes. None of the views represented here are mine, but **cv** will be covering some of the themes in future issues.

Challenging common perceptions of volunteering

Matthew Thomson argues that traditional forms of volunteering have less and less relevance to the communities most in need of the benefits of civic renewal. He says that volunteers should be encouraged to 'own and be honest about their own needs, rather than forced (either consciously or unconsciously) into the straitjacket of altruistic philanthropy where only their 'beneficiaries' have needs'. Thomson argues that the needs of the volunteer should be met through the volunteering process as much as those that are designated as recipients of volunteer services. And that if current modes of volunteering are not changed, there is a risk that they will reinforce the very social divisions that volunteering is expected to bridge. The civic renewal that is sought will only be brought about by people coming together regardless of their capacity, ability or skill to work towards goals that are at once personal and common. His main points are:

- Volunteering is widely seen as the donation of time by people who see themselves as better off, to those whom they perceive to be worse off, creating an often-artificial gradient of power between the powerful benefactors and powerless beneficiaries. Thus, volunteers' needs are often suppressed, and there is an inherent problem with encouraging more people to take part, especially those from less privileged sections of society.
- Many volunteering and charitable organisations respond to the failure of communities to pick up the tasks they had undertaken in the past – eg shopping or caring for a neighbour. Thus, the renewal of the community has been delegated to external agents whose jobs rely on the continued neediness of the communities, and whose structures are a mix of volunteers and paid staff who are often in competition and don't understand each other.
- Volunteers working in mega-charities who absorb up to 90% of charitable funding and discharge quasi-statutory duties are less likely to fulfil the brief of civic renewal than volunteers working in smaller charities whose roles are defined by their own communities.
- Many organisations stifle the creativity that volunteering should unleash by telling volunteers what's expected of them rather than allowing them to apply their own initiative.
- If volunteering is to contribute to civic renewal it must alter its philanthropic image. While many people equate the meaning of the verb volunteer with 'work without payment', it also means 'to offer to do something', and 'say or suggest something without being asked' (usually obscured by the economic perspective). Volunteering is first and foremost the exercise of free will, and this is why it should be fundamentally attractive to disadvantaged groups. Volunteers can become agents of change in their own right.
- Greater emphasis needs to be placed on values such as reciprocity, mutuality, and even personal benefit, as drivers of volunteering. The idea of individual and community self-help must be regained.
- Volunteering needs to expand in terms of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of marginalised groups to whom volunteering needs to be brought, and it needs to expand to escape the shackle of 'without payment' which culturally and practically inhibits the involvement of the most impoverished people in communities. Volunteering needs to move beyond its connotation of work for organisations, and reclaim the informal mosaic of tasks that were once the invisible glue holding the community together, and which were delivered by individuals to individuals.

Making volunteering count

Victoria Nash describes the Government's aim of civic renewal as 'more a vision of a certain type of society than a particular measurable outcome'. Volunteering is often held to have a unique role to play in supporting processes of civic renewal by 'offering citizens the experience of direct engagement in their communities that can lead to broader habits of civic engagement'. Nash believes that although New Labour has explicitly linked policy on volunteering with admirable long-term goals of civic renewal, this will only be achieved if policies on how volunteering can contribute are clarified. Her main points are:

- Volunteering is a necessary but not sufficient contributor to civic renewal: volunteering activities will support but not guarantee it. Greater cross-cutting needs to be developed on volunteering, citizenship, education, civil and political participation and public involvement or consultation.
- Volunteering and civic involvement should be a mainstay of quality public services, healthy communities and successful regeneration – not an add-on. Volunteering is still seen as too detached from other areas of government policy.
- Volunteering needs to benefit the community in a qualitative not quantitative way: any drive to support volunteering needs also to support processes and infrastructures which will connect up volunteers with valued and necessary activities and lead to ongoing civic involvement.
- Individuals need to be shaped and socialised as part of a *process* that also inculcates skills or provides a particular service. This will lead to ensuring that more attention is directed to the responsibilities of voluntary organisations themselves and the experience of volunteers.

FEATURE: To have, or not to have, VOLUNTEER AGREEMENTS ...

The most important management tool?

Whilst many organisations treat volunteers and paid staff the same in terms of the training and management they receive, volunteers *are* different. They give their time freely, and often have different motivations, and different expectations of the organisation. For example, a volunteer might expect you to give them preferential treatment because they are turning up for free. Quite often, an organisation can experience this sort of time-consuming ‘tail wagging the dog’ scenario, where it runs around trying to find things for volunteers to do, and to keep them happy simply because they are there and willing. Just as likely is the scenario where a volunteer turns up regularly to carry out an invaluable service and is overlooked, undervalued and generally taken for granted. Having a volunteer agreement in place will help to avoid these situations by clarifying expectations and responsibilities, and – if backed up by proper procedures – will be the key to the successful involvement of volunteers.

Avoiding employment law

Some people, however, are wary of volunteer agreements. Legal experts may warn you that by having them in place you are taking a step towards the grey area of contracts of employment, and the law that accompanies them. Currently, there is no equivalent of employment law that can be applied to volunteering. So, what aggrieved volunteers have done in the past (only a very small number to date) is try (some successfully) to claim that they had a contract of employment with the organisation. The law can recognise even verbal agreements as legally binding contracts, and so an organisation can be accused of having a contract of employment with a volunteer regardless of whether something is in writing (**cv** will look at legal issues in more detail later in the year).

But, without a statement of mutual intentions it is very hard for either party to be clear about what can be expected in the volunteering relationship. And there are ways of avoiding the language that can get you into trouble from a legal perspective, for example:

Don't use

Job
Job description
Contract
Work

Use

Volunteer role
Volunteer role summary
Volunteer agreement
Volunteering / Voluntary work

In fact, it's wise always to put the word ‘volunteering’ or voluntary in front of everything such as expenses, training, benefits, etc to be absolutely clear that these things relate to a voluntary role, and not a paid one.

It also is important to say somewhere on the agreement that it is 'binding in honour only' and is not expected to be a legally binding contract. And it's useful to state that either party can end the agreement at any time.

A volunteer agreement should be a simple statement of what each party will *endeavour* to do – you should avoid enforcing any kind of commitment from your volunteers, so, for example, the agreement might say that each party will 'do its best' to offer services – some of which are listed below.

What to include

The National Centre for Volunteering has two different models you can download for free from their web site at <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/workwith/sample.htm>. One is more formal than the other and you can decide what's the best model for your organisation. The agreement can be as long or as short as you wish it to be. A longer agreement might list in detail all the procedures and policies in place, but a short one might just refer to the range of procedures as listed in a Volunteer Handbook (every organisation should have one), which keeps the agreement simple and uncomplicated.

The first section will list the things that the volunteer-involving organisation will do its best to provide such as:

- Training
- Insurance
- Equipment
- Out of pocket, receipted expenses.

And the second part will list the policies and procedures it expects the volunteer to do their best to adhere to, for example:

- Turning up on time
- Attending training
- Volunteering in line with the organisation's procedures eg, confidentiality, health and safety, etc
- Performing their volunteer role to the best of their ability.

Agreements can also list the period of volunteering, so that both parties have a fixed point at which progress and changes can be discussed, and the next stage of volunteering agreed. Both parts should be signed and dated by the relevant party.

SEX, VOLUNTEERS, AND THE NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM ...

In the last issue of *cv* you may remember we looked at how and when to advertise for volunteers. *Third Sector* magazine brought to our attention this month that the NRM are using sex to entice volunteers to clean out locomotive fire-boxes. The poster – which is to appear in 500 pubs and clubs across Yorkshire – features a young woman's denimed bottom, complete with protruding thong, two sooty hand marks on her buttocks, and a spanner in a back pocket. In a £2,500 advertising campaign to attract younger volunteers, the slogan says 'Get down and dirty', and goes on to say 'It's a dirty job but someone's got to do it. Cleaning out one of our steamy loco's hot fire-boxes we mean. But if that doesn't turn you on then there's plenty of other restorations and behind the scenes projects you can get stuck into ... if you want something useful to do with your hands ...'. The Museums Association policy officer described the ad as 'cheap and a bit lazy to use sex in this kind of way to sell the museum'. But it is certainly eye-catching, and (rightly or wrongly) is at least likely to appeal to the museum's existing 89% (not to mention future) male volunteering population. A brighter approach might have been to get

Levi's to sponsor the campaign, with an equally provocative young bloke in a pair of their jeans, to attract some female volunteers (and give each volunteer a free pair!). Perhaps the NRM needs to think more about diversifying its volunteer base and listen less to their advertising firm. But we shouldn't be too hard on them. The NRM knows only too well that this has to be *the* unsexiest volunteering job in the world, and so I'd like to think it's a bit tongue-in-cheek.

MANAGING VOLUNTEER BEHAVIOURS

The Museums Association covered an important volunteering issue in their recent Journal's *Ethics* Q&A. A museum sought advice about an unruly volunteer it had had to dismiss, and the damaging effect on the morale of the other volunteers. It asked whether it should reinstate the volunteer. The good advice given was for the museum to ensure that its own training and supervision procedures help volunteers to understand why certain behaviours are inappropriate, giving them the chance to change, rather than just moving to dismissal.

Grievance and disciplinary procedures are important, but so is the need to understand the reasons behind the volunteer's behaviour, particularly in the context of their motivation for volunteering in the first place, and their expectations. And different disciplinary procedures might be required for different groups of volunteers. For example, the Imperial War Museum North in Manchester has a 'Three Strikes And You're Out' policy for their 13-17 year old volunteers. The kids don't need to see 'the policy' on paper – they understand from the language that if they push the boundaries too far and too often, then the museum will offer their place to someone who's serious about being part of the team.

NEW RESOURCE WEBSITE

www.professionals4free.org.uk is a new web site that offers a searchable database of organisations providing free professional services to voluntary and community groups.

NEXT ISSUE

In August, **cv** will be hearing about the volunteers who support the **Cheshire Rural Touring Network**, how the **National Maritime Museum**, **Greenwich plans to develop its volunteer programme**, and what's happening at the **Criminal Records Bureau**.

FEEDBACK

cv is keen to respond to your interests and needs. If you would like to forward your news and views, comment on content, or suggest a topic for discussion, please email lynn@lynnblackadder.com.

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