

INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY TOOLKIT

Removing barriers to
volunteering



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Introduction

This toolkit and your organisation

This toolkit aims to provide information around developing an inclusive volunteering offer for your organisation. In it, we offer some practical tips to creating an inclusive environment, enhancing your approach to volunteer recruitment and providing a structure for reflection on your current approaches.

The toolkit is quite idealistic as inclusion and diversity is complex and an ever-changing journey. After speaking to your volunteers or staff, they may prefer a different term to one mentioned here or may discuss things that aren't included within it. It is just a starting point and an addition to bigger conversations and more in-depth research.



Important questions before you start

This toolkit may bring up difficult conversations, questions and topics around themes such as pronoun use, supporting culturally diverse volunteers, and barriers that exist in the third sector. Because of this, it's first step is around reflective practice and asking ourselves some questions:

- Am I in the right mindset to think about equity, diversity and inclusion?
- Am I ready to be introspective and explore my own biases with open-mindedness?
- How do I define equity, diversity and inclusion and what does this look like in my organisation?
- Am I ready to think about and to implement changes to become a more inclusive organisation?

Investing in the diversity of volunteers

An undeniable strength of the third sector is the ability to reach even the most marginalised communities and offer person-centred support in ways that are meaningful to them. Having diversity means that when supporting individuals and volunteers, they may be more able to relate to and in turn support those who have had similar experiences to them.

Often, individuals may find that building connections with those who come from a similar background, easier and can understand the specific experiences of being a part of that group.

Skill variety and drawing on lived experience

Diversity means that volunteers will have had different experiences, and these experiences will then shape the way they take on roles and impact organisations in different ways. As a volunteer manager it is important to consider how people's life experiences will impact on their ability to engage in volunteering.

Consider learning more about topics such as trauma informed practice to enable you to create a safe environment for volunteers. For more details go to [page 18](#).



Creating a more fair and equal society

Historically, many groups have had larger barriers to access certain sectors than others, for example the recruitment of culturally diverse communities into senior positions. By creating a microcosm of diversity within our organisations and providing space for unheard voices, we can work towards creating a more equal society.

Seeing people who are like you, whether that is in terms of ethnicity, sexuality, disability, gender, or a combination of these things, can have a meaningful impact in the way people from these communities see themselves.

Creating roles which support volunteers from marginalised backgrounds can often create a positive cycle, where organisations with a positive reputation for being diverse and inclusive are then approached by more people from diverse communities.

A strong representation of diversity within your organisation offers inspiration to others and challenges beliefs around what individuals from those groups can and cannot do, both from outside communities and individuals themselves. It's difficult to feel you can achieve your goals until you see someone who represents you doing it.

Each organisation is different, and this index works as a collaboration across diverse communities and sectors.

It's important that individuals from all levels of your organisation have the chance to contribute to this assessment to understand how inclusion and diversity is perceived differently across your organisation. Revisit the index regularly to see the development of equality, diversity and inclusion in within your organisation.

Volunteer Centre Leeds inclusivity index

The following index can be completed by staff and volunteers to give an overview of the inclusivity of your organisation and the changes that can be made. Although this is only a guide, it may be helpful to understand how these statements work within your organisation and what statements can be added.



On the scale below, tick the boxes to show how much you agree with the statement:

Statement	1 - Strongly disagree (1 point)	2 - Disagree (2 points)	3 - Neither agree nor disagree (3 points)	4 - Agree (4 points)	5 - Strongly agree (5 points)
There's consistency across my organisation in the experiences of volunteers, e.g. using the same questions when interviewing, having the same access to resources and training etc.					
Appropriate adjustments are made according to people's individual needs, e.g. giving interview questions in advance, allowing breaks when needed etc.					
Volunteers who support the organisation to grow and develop are rewarded and recognised fairly.					
Staff and volunteers at my organisation respect and value each other's opinions.					
Members of my team fairly consider ideas and suggestions offered by other team members.					
I feel welcome to express my true feelings in my organisation and feel physically and emotionally safe within the space.					
Communication we receive from the organisation is honest and open.					
The backgrounds, beliefs and experiences of volunteers are understood and respected by the organisation as a whole.					
Managers, staff and volunteers at my organisation are as diverse as the broader workforce and the communities we support.					
I trust that my organisation will take action to resolve concerns I have about discriminatory behaviours.					
Total score:					

Go to the [end](#) of this booklet to find out your score and key areas of change that can be made.

Barriers to volunteering

We've categorised the kinds of barriers into 5 groups:



Personal – relating to the volunteer themselves



Social – how volunteers interact with others and vice versa



Physical – tangible barriers in your organisational space and beyond



Perception – perceived barriers by potential volunteers



Organisational – relating to the organisation itself

Type of Barrier	Barrier	Tips and Solutions
Personal	Time constraints	Flexible roles: evenings & weekends.
	Childcare needs	Location, shorter volunteer hours.
	Benefits	Knowledge on expenses / how to claim pre-paid bus tickets (possibly put under location as well).
Social	English as a second language	See them as an individual with unique skills and experiences. Translation applications and services can be used to support difficult explanations. Identify tasks where knowledge of English is not a primary characteristic. Consider different modes of communication e.g. email, text, mobile app or newsletter.
	Mental health	Regular one-to-one conversations to collect feedback and ensure volunteers feel comfortable in their role. Available break spaces away from noise. Accepting of differences in capacity.
Physical	Physical mobility	Wheelchair accessible ramps. Wide and open spaces. Accessible toilets. Transport accessible e.g. by bus, consider roles which can be done remotely.
	Environment made for non-disabled people	Large print forms audio/video versions of documentation.
Perception	Visas / benefits	Knowledge on how to access information around Visas. Contact Volunteer Centres for more support and information.
	DBS checks	Contact your regional DBS outreach service. Take advantage of DBS services e.g. confidential checking service for transgender individuals, fingerprint method for those who haven't lived in the UK for five years. Don't complete DBS checks when they are not required.
	Perceptions of judgement	Understanding the individual as well as their perceived identities. Be open to conversation around adjustments and change. Grow relationships with local organisations with specialisations in different communities. Offer multiple-day inductions to allowing volunteers to get a sense of the role. Offer supervisions at the end of inductions to give space to the volunteer for any adjustments.
Organisational	Budgets	When planning improvements to diversity and inclusion, make sure to set aside a budget for implementation.

Designing an inclusive recruitment process

Role description and advertisement

Formatting

Formatting is an overlooked part of creating roles for many volunteer coordinators. This is one of the first things a potential volunteer will see when engaging with roles they have an interest in and may even be the make-or-break point for whether they feel confident in applying.

Some things to consider when formatting your role descriptions are:

- Larger fonts
- Uncomplicated and concise language
- Text, photo, video and/or audio versions of role descriptions
- Advertisements that aren't solely online e.g. posters at the Volunteer Centre, community centres, parks etc.
- Being friendly and informal where possible
- Translations into languages most used by the communities your organisation serves

Just a few of these tweaks can ensure individuals cannot only access your roles but engage with and understand them easily.



Location

Where organisations advertise their roles is an important part in who and how individuals apply to an opportunity.

When looking for volunteers, the first thought tends to revolve around convenience and reaching the largest audience. However, unfortunately, this sometimes means excluding a few communities who may find it harder to find these roles.

Advertising a role online is almost always the first checkbox as it's fast and simple, and anyone with an internet connection can find it.

However, to take it a step further, a great approach is to promote your roles through local communities as well, using flyers and posters in community environments such as religious spaces, community and job/support centres, and connecting directly with community leaders. This not only spreads the word about your organisation and roles, but also builds a positive rapport and reputation for your organisation within these communities.

Volunteer Centres are a fantastic way to promote your roles to more diverse groups. At the Volunteer Centre Leeds, we not only have a diverse visitor base but also a whole host of ways to recruit volunteers. These include; Volunteer Centre takeovers where we invite organisations to host a stall in front of our space within Leeds Kirkgate Market, and 'Opportunity of the Week' where we spread the message of voluntary organisations around Leeds on our social media for a week.

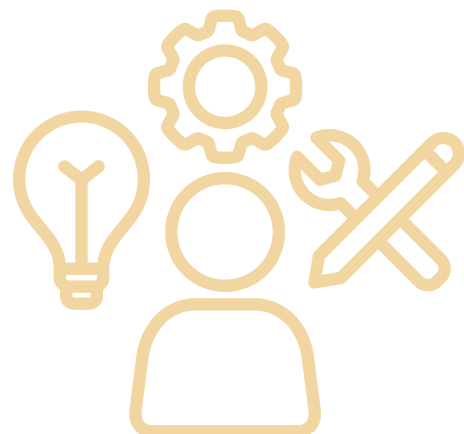
Skill set

Anxieties around skillset and thoughts of 'not being good enough' impact many potential volunteers.

Despite volunteering being seen as a stepping-stone in skills growth, sometimes the ideas around how difficult a role may be, can create anxiety for a potential volunteer. It may not be stated but sometimes, the belief of the perceived difficulty of a role may sway a potential volunteer.

In light of this, it may be worth considering emphasising the skills needed for the roles; what skills can be developed as volunteers progress and whether or not having the perceived experience for the role is a requirement.

Consider creating roles with varying levels of skillset to ensure both accessibility and skill growth.



The application process

Applying for any type of role can be a daunting task and applying for volunteering is no exception. The idea that applying for volunteering can be just as difficult as applying for employment is a thought many people share, with some application questions requiring lengthy answers and volunteers undergoing formal interviews, applying to become a volunteer can seem like a huge task.

Some ways to combat this as volunteer co-ordinators are to:

- Complete an application at interview with the volunteer.
 - Minimise lengthy application forms and remove unnecessary complications.
 - Use simple language when creating applications or consider using expression of interest forms instead.
 - Plan volunteer recruitment open days where potential volunteers can meet other volunteers and staff to ask questions.
- Tailor recruitment processes for different roles.
 - Offer the option to complete applications in different formats e.g. video application/ voice recording.
 - Consider gathering important information at the start of the process to keep applications succinct. Use a simple expression of interest form to gather information such as demographic details at a later stage.



Volunteer engagement discussions

The first conversations between a co-ordinator and a potential candidate can be stressful, whether for paid employment or volunteering. Potential volunteers may feel a pressure to present themselves in the most positive light, despite possibly using volunteering as a tool for skills growth. It's important to emphasise to potential volunteers that these initial meetings are not a formal interview but a conversation about a mutual relationship.

Sometimes, something as simple as not sitting across a table in an initial conversation is enough to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding, rather than of stress. Letting volunteers know that the interview is casual and giving them the interview questions beforehand can often ease a lot of the nerves volunteers may feel before meeting the volunteer manager.

Consider offering different formatting for these conversations (e.g. over Zoom or Microsoft Teams) as many individuals may struggle with factors such as their mobility, anxiety or scheduling difficulties.



References and DBS checks

In a lot of cases, your volunteers may not have a background in the sector they are volunteering in and so may not be familiar with UK standards for background checks. Many countries don't have policies on references and many sectors don't require DBS checks. If a volunteer hasn't seen these policies before, they may feel a little worried.

References are a great way to work out a potential volunteer's experience and history. Many people may find it difficult to provide specific references including those who have been unemployed for a lengthy period e.g. refugees and asylum seekers, those with criminal convictions and individuals who identify as Transgender. There are helpful adjustments you can make to ease this process for them.

References for volunteering can come in many forms e.g. this may be a manager, teacher or social worker for a professional reference or a close friend for a personal one.

Although most employment checks ask for two references who have known the applicant for more than two years, this may not be necessary for volunteering, and depends upon the level of safeguarding for the specific role.

In terms of DBS checks, making it clear why one is needed for a role, as well as what is involved and what this might mean for your volunteers, may be all it takes to ease concern. Going through the application procedure alongside your volunteer can be very helpful for those who haven't had a DBS check before. You can get in touch with the regional outreach officer for your area if you have any questions or need any more information.

DBS top tips:

- Volunteers can register onto the DBS online update service for free.
- Where individuals have not lived in the UK for the previous five years, a fingerprint can be given at a police station.

The power of language

The power of language can sometimes be downplayed i.e. “it’s just a word so why does it matter”, however language is the way we perceive the world around us and how we interact with it. When interacting with marginalised communities the language we use can have a huge impact. Below are some examples of this:



Although the table is a starting point towards reflecting more on the language we use, it’s important to remember that the terminologies marginalised communities and individuals use are incredibly personal. Two individuals from the same community may use completely different language to describe their identity and experiences and may even use terminology that differs. This is why it’s incredibly important to be open to the dialogue of your volunteers and the staff in your organisation as everyone will have their own unique experiences within the intersections of their identities.

Avoid	Use
'BAME, BME'	Global majority, culturally diverse; black, white, Asian, Hispanic etc.
'Special needs'	Disabled, person with a disability, additional needs
'he', 'she', 'madam', 'sir'	They/them, everyone, team, community.
Ex-offender	People with lived experience of the criminal justice system.

There is a move from using the term 'equality,' which implies that everyone receives the same treatment, to the term of 'equity,' which means providing individuals with the support they need to promote inclusivity.

Steps from making mistakes and towards using inclusive language



Language in volunteering

It's important to use language which properly reflects both inclusive volunteering practices and the laws around differences between volunteering and paid employment.

Avoiding language such as 'contract', 'interview', 'shifts' and instead opting for wording such as 'volunteer agreement', 'introductory chat' and 'sessions' will make a difference.



Next steps

As mentioned, this toolkit is only the start. It's incredibly important to go away and do research independently and have these conversations with your volunteers and staff members openly.

Cultivating organisational culture is a journey and unfortunately, there is no quick fix.

Creating an action plan for this ongoing development means you are able to hold yourself accountable and track progress within your organisation.



Step	Action	Consideration	Your Answers
1	Reflect	<p>What have I learnt from this toolkit?</p> <p>What did I understand?</p> <p>What did I struggle with and why?</p>	
2	Internal research	<p>What structures and plans related to volunteering does my organisation already have in place?</p> <p>Can I use the results from the index within this toolkit to plan?</p>	
3	Create realistic goals	<p>What goals are realistic within my organisation?</p> <p>What are we trying to achieve within our volunteering team?</p>	
4	Assign tangible tasks	<p>What does our current funding allow us to achieve in terms of diversity, equality and inclusion within our volunteer strategy?</p>	

5	Consider timelines	Diversity, equality and inclusion is a long-term goal, what can we realistically achieve in each quarter?	
6	Create visual action plans	<p>What can we do to make the action plan as accessible as possible?</p> <p>Where can we present the action plan to keep it at the forefront of our work?</p>	
7	Monitor progress regularly	<p>What is the best way to report progress to the rest of my organisation?</p> <p>How can we ensure we are consistently monitoring our goals?</p>	



Useful resources



Training and useful Links

One of the next steps for your action plan may include training or further learning into diversity, equality and inclusion and its impact. There are many organisations in Leeds who provide training and resources around supporting diversity within charities.

Trauma informed practice

Investigating the trauma marginalised communities may have experienced and how we as organisations can use this in our approaches to support.

- [West Yorkshire Partnership](#)

Cultural competency training

Building the skills and knowledge around different cultures leading to stronger bonds and better communication.

- [Forum Central](#)
- [Leeds Health and Care Academy](#)

There are many organisations in Leeds which have specialised knowledge in supporting marginalised communities.

You can find these organisations on the Doing Good Leeds Directory:

<https://doinggoodleeds.org.uk/find-an-organisation/>

For links to a range of equality in volunteering related documents go to:

<https://doinggoodleeds.org.uk/inclusive-volunteering-2/>

Inclusive volunteering badge

Now you have spent some time reviewing your volunteering approaches you can register for the inclusive volunteering badge.

[Sign up to register](#)

or

scan the QR code below:



Volunteer Centre Leeds Inclusivity Index (2023) - Scoring

Statement	Points	What was Measured	Actions for Improvement
There is consistency across my organisation in the experiences of volunteers, e.g. Do the same roles have the same interview questions, access to resources etc?		Equality	Standardise process for roles. Have the same interview questions for one role. Ensure every individual within a team has the same access to resources and opportunities.
Appropriate adjustments are made according to people's individual needs.		Equity	Give interview questions in advance. Have conversations around needs e.g. break times, safe spaces etc.
Volunteers who support the organisation to grow and develop are rewarded and recognised fairly.		Feeling Valued	Acknowledge achievements and efforts regularly of both your team and individuals.
Staff and volunteers at my organisation respect and value each other's opinions.		Integrating differences	Be open to learning about cultures and backgrounds that may be different to yours.
Members of my team fairly consider ideas and suggestions offered by other team members.		Decision making	Ensure individuals are given a chance to contribute in different ways suiting different communication styles e.g. group work, supervisions, idea boxes. Include individuals with lived experience within decision making.

I feel welcome to express my true feelings in my organisation and feel physically and emotionally safe within the space.		Safety	Be open to difficult conversations around what it means to be safe for different people. Understand others may have different experiences to yourself.
Communication we receive from the organisation is honest and open.		Trust	Ensure every member of the team has access to the same information.
The backgrounds, beliefs and experiences of Volunteers are well understood and respected by the organisation as a whole.		Belonging	Encourage team members to engage in training to understand different communities e.g. cultural diversity, religious diversity. Allow opportunity to express individual needs rather than assuming all individuals of a specific identity experience the world the same.
Managers, staff and volunteers at my organisation are as diverse as the broader workforce and the communities we support.		Diversity	Regularly assess the diversity of your team and compare this to your local community and the communities you seek to support. Actively seek to recruit diverse team members with intention to value different skillsets rather than to 'check boxes'.
I trust that my organisation will take action to resolve concerns I have about discriminatory behaviours.		Action	Acknowledge any concerns raised to you, 'I hear you'. Give regular updates on any concerns where you can. Have clear policies which can be followed and acted upon.

Find out more

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