

Let's talk
about
inclusion:

Promoting inclusion in your volunteer involving organisation

August 2014



Introduction

The following resource is available for members of volunteer involving organisations who want to develop a more inclusive environment in their organisation.

The insights from this resource flow from the work that was carried out in Volunteering ACT's Inclusive Volunteering Program between 2012 and 2014 and is inspired by those individuals, in volunteer involving organisations, who have welcomed individuals from vulnerable sectors of the community into their volunteer workforce.

This resource is designed for people who want to make that kind of positive difference in the lives of others. As a free publication you are welcome to print copies and share it with like-minded people.

Thank you for your interest in building inclusion and good luck with the journey ahead.

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What do we mean by inclusion?

Social inclusion has the aim of valuing all people particularly through opening opportunities so they can participate fully in their community.

The work of inclusion is particularly focused on providing support and seeking opportunities for people who experience exclusion in their lives. There are many, in our community, who experience social isolation on a daily basis. Often it's because of issues related to disability, culture and language.

The volunteering sector can be a powerful setting for inclusive achievements. Opening the door to a socially isolated individual can make an enormous difference in their lives not only in providing an experience of acceptance but also in giving them a chance to let their potential and skills shine.

How will your volunteering program benefit from a more inclusive approach?

A volunteer involving organisation can experience considerable benefits through adopting a more inclusive approach to recruiting and retaining volunteers. The benefits include:

Attracting a more diverse group of volunteers

Through engaging volunteers from varying backgrounds and abilities you will attract volunteers who will offer your volunteering program a wide range of skills, experiences and perspectives.

Building a more sustainable volunteer workforce

Adopting a more inclusive approach is a smart strategy particularly given the impact the aging population is likely to have on volunteer recruitment in the years to come. A broad, inclusive outreach in recruitment may be the difference between a volunteer program flourishing or ceasing.

Reflecting the community as a whole in your volunteering program

A volunteering program that reflects the community as a whole is more attractive to that community.

Creating an inclusive climate in your organisation

Creating an inclusive climate in your organisation will promote equity, enhance organisational effectiveness and capitalise on the talents of your staff. Feedback received from volunteer involving organisations, in relation to inclusive placements, has indicated inclusion can promote increased skills and satisfaction for those who manage or work alongside inclusive recruits.

Organisational self-assessment

The following self-assessment questions may help you identify areas where you can build a more inclusive approach in recruiting and retaining your volunteer workforce:

1. ADDRESSING THE BASICS

Do your organisation's policies acknowledge and support inclusive volunteering?

Do you provide information about your organisation and volunteering opportunities:

- In simple and accessible language
- In languages other than English
- In alternative formats (eg. audio for people who are visually impaired)

When advertising volunteer positions do you indicate that you welcome:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- People with disabilities
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Are your premises accessible to people with mobility issues?

Are the signs displayed in your premises easy to understand and follow?

Is your induction and orientation process the same for all volunteers or are you able to offer a degree of flexibility which can take into account personal factors (eg. sight or hearing impairment, a limited capacity to process information, a physical incapacity to attend a meeting at a particular location)?

Is there any resistance in your organisation, in attitudes or other ways, which could challenge a more inclusive approach to recruiting and supporting volunteers?

2. IDENTIFYING INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES

Is there a backlog of certain types of work in your organisation? Alternatively, are there inefficiencies in the way people are using their time in the workplace? (eg. Are staff members taken away from their main work due to having to catch up on administrative tasks? Are staff so busy, in aged care facilities, that they don't have time to give residents as much attention as would be beneficial? Are there conservation projects that have been on hold because of a lack of workers?).

Have you considered addressing the issue you've identified through inclusive recruitment?

Are there vacant roles in your volunteer workforce which could be broken down into smaller components? (eg. an organisation might advertise for a volunteer project officer who will carry out a phone survey, keep data entry up to date and then write a report – it may be feasible to have three volunteers carrying out the three components separately)

The power of conversations

Often the most substantial changes in organisations and communities are brought about through the accumulated influence that comes through many conversations over time. Conversations help to identify shared values, build networks of like-minded people and provide avenues for exploring possibilities.

In your initial conversations with colleagues about inclusion, you can start the ball rolling with “I’ve been wondering how we could be more inclusive...” The Organisational Self-Assessment, in the previous section, may be a good reference in your conversations.

It’s good to have initial conversations with people who are likely to be open to inclusion. This can provide experience of a positive conversation that’s focused on possibility rather than arguing against someone’s 101 reasons why inclusion just can’t happen. It’s important, initially, to take steps that help to build confidence and support.

Who are the positive people in your organisation you might speak to?

Once you’ve had your conversation, how did you find the experience? Was it encouraging, challenging or surprising?

Did the conversations generate any practical ideas that might contribute to building inclusion in your organisation?

Next steps

Individual conversations, mentioned in the previous section, are a good first step towards building inclusion in your organisation. You will need to get others on board if there's need for major change in your organisation and it's important to identify the most effective way forward in achieving that support. Your options may include putting inclusion on the agenda of an organisational meeting or meeting a key leader in the organisation to discuss the issue.

No matter what approach you take it's important to have thought through:

- what the concern is
- why the concern needs to be addressed
- how the concern could be addressed

WHAT THE CONCERN IS

It's important to be clear and concise about this. The concern might not just be that your organisation isn't as inclusive as it could be. In addition there may be related concerns that there are insufficient volunteers or that current recruitment of volunteers is falling or that the organisation has only been seen as being there for certain sectors of the community.

WHY THE CONCERN NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED

This step is about putting the concerns together (where there's more than one) and showing how they all relate. In terms of inclusion, this is where you show that addressing the issue of inclusion will be beneficial to your organisation and that not addressing inclusion is likely to be detrimental.

HOW THE CONCERN COULD BE ADDRESSED

The issue of inclusion often remains in the realm of being "a really important issue that somebody should do something about some day." If you raise the issue of inclusion it's important to propose some specific course of action – something that will move beyond a vague sense of concern that's going nowhere in particular. A proposal will also carry more weight if you are prepared to indicate your willingness to be involved in its implementation.

A few examples of presenting a call to action about inclusion

EXAMPLE ONE

Our organisation's mission statement emphasises the importance of inclusion. I have a concern that our current recruitment strategy for volunteers isn't reaching out to the broadest cross-section of the community. If we continue down this path, I believe our organisation will end up being seen as irrelevant. I propose we review how we advertise our volunteering roles and where we advertise to see if we can improve our outreach. I'm willing to do what I can to make that happen.

EXAMPLE TWO

I've noticed, around the office, that we're all pushed to the limit with work and the backlog of data entry and archiving is getting ridiculous. If this keeps up we won't be able to find documents when we need them and the disorganisation just isn't a good look. Now we've had some enquiries from a disability organisation looking for office based volunteering opportunities for some of their clients. How about we have a meeting with them and see if they have someone who can help with this administration work? It would be a good outcome for them and for us. I'm happy to make the call.

EXAMPLE THREE

I think it's great that we've taken a step forward with being inclusive and accepted John as a volunteer. I've heard some people in the organisation are still uncomfortable about his autism and especially the challenges of communicating with him. I'm worried if we don't tackle that discomfort, and think about some solutions, the viability of John's volunteering might be compromised. I know John's connected to a disability organisation and they've offered to help out if anything comes up. How about I ring them and see if they can come and give us a bit of input about how to work well with John?

EXAMPLE FOUR

We haven't had any success recruiting a volunteer for our new project. I'm concerned it won't get off the ground. I know we specified that we just wanted one volunteer and we designed our job description based on that. I've been wondering if we might have a better chance of getting this project up and running if we think flexibly, and maybe recruit a few people who could each do part of the role. It could also be a good way of being a bit more inclusive with our recruiting. I'm happy to help review the job description and see if we can come up with an alternative.

EXAMPLE FIVE

There's been a noticeable increase in our organisation providing help to people from a particular ethnic community but I've noticed there have been issues with communication. I'm concerned the quality of our service is being compromised by the miscommunication. How about we look for a suitable person from their community and see if they're interested in joining our front desk volunteering team.

Fears related to inclusion

A common reaction to the possibility of building inclusion is fear: fear of the unknown, fear of complication, fear of being crushed by yet another addition to an already too heavy workload. There needs to be a place, in conversations about inclusion, for fears and concerns to be expressed, heard and discussed.

Some common fears and how they might be addressed

“I’m worried that I won’t be able to understand the person if I’m working with them.”

Communication can be challenging and if a person has limited English, a strong accent or a speech impediment then the challenge can be even greater. Often time is the essential ingredient in gaining an understanding of the way someone else communicates. Be patient with yourself as well as with the other person and explore different ways of getting the message across. When recruiting someone who may have communication challenges ask if there are alternate ways of communicating that are helpful (eg. through writing or through gestures).

“I’ve never worked with someone with a disability. I’m really worried that I won’t know what to do if something goes wrong.”

Inclusion is an interesting process. Sometimes it brings to light our own sense of vulnerability particularly when we feel that we’re faced with the unknown. It’s helpful, particularly during the recruitment process, to ask if there are any particular issues that fellow workers should know about. For example if the person has indicated that they’re epileptic it is appropriate to ask if there are particular triggers (eg. fluorescent lights, noise etc) and if they have a care plan for when seizures happen. It’s always appropriate to find out the information that will ensure a healthy and safe workplace.

“I’m worried I might say the wrong thing.”

It sometimes takes time to get to know and relate to someone else. If you find you’re working with someone with a disability, only refer to the disability when it’s necessary and appropriate. Also it’s great to offer help but try not to presume the person needs your help. Sometimes we can tangle ourselves up in our own presumptions about other people.

“I’m worried we won’t be able to get the work done if we include this person.”

It often takes a period of trial and error before people find the best way to work together. Time and patience are key ingredients. It’s also important to make an effort in getting team members on board when it comes to inclusion. Letting people know that they’re helping the organisation to grow and develop in a new way may be a helpful motivator.

Volunteering ACT and inclusion

Volunteering ACT's Inclusive Volunteering Program provides support to facilitate vulnerable people into volunteering placements which will enable an increase in social and economic participation in the broader community. The Program assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Program also has the aim of supporting volunteer involving organisations in the development of more inclusive recruitment and retention strategies.

Give Volunteering ACT a call, on (02) 62514060, if you are one of Volunteering ACT's member organisations and you want to:

- develop volunteer job descriptions with a more inclusive angle,
- discuss strategies for creating a greater inclusivity in your volunteering group
- or connect with individuals from vulnerable backgrounds who are looking for an inclusive opportunity

Some other helpful connections

ACT Community Services Directorate engage with the business and community sectors in developing opportunities for people with disabilities along with work involving the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the multicultural sector. Further information can be found here: http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/disability_act/business_and_community

Advocacy for Inclusion delivers public workshops and in house training related to Inclusion Awareness. <http://www.advocacyforinclusion.org>

Volunteering WA's online resource, Enhancing Access, provides information related to inclusion and disability awareness and can be found here: <http://ea.volunteeringwa.org.au/>

Conclusion

We often can't foresee the change that might be provoked when we engage people in conversations about what we care about. It's impossible for this publication to provide a clear picture of the way inclusion will grow and develop through your conversations with others in your organisation. The outcome will be shaped by the individuals who are involved and the structure and nature of your organisation.

There's no doubt the journey will involve highs and lows and the experience of both barriers and breakthroughs. It's important to take care of yourself on the journey and support those others who share your commitment.

Conversations that lead to action may not only make a life-giving difference for someone currently experiencing exclusion in the community. They may also make a life-giving difference to you.

Good luck with your efforts.

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