



retaining volunteers

top tips

Most companies will tell you that it is very expensive to recruit new staff and that it is important to retain people for this reason alone; this theory applies to volunteers too. Of course, there are many other reasons why we don't want to lose people from our clubs and these Top Tips will help you to look at how to retain your volunteers.

Throughout the text, reference is made to sports 'clubs'. This term is used to include all sports organisations, such as leagues, county and area associations, and other community groups that provide sporting opportunities, whether in an organised setting, or a more informal environment.

why retain volunteers?

It is an important part of the overall Volunteer Action Plan (see the runningsports Workbook *Valuing Your Sports Volunteers* for further information on this – purchase a copy from www.runningsports.org) that the Volunteer Coordinator, the club committee and all club members understand why it is important to retain volunteers. At the very least, this will help to ensure that people don't take any actions which result in the loss of volunteers.

It is important to retain volunteers for the following reasons:

- ❖ Recruiting new volunteers is costly and time-consuming.
- ❖ The experience of your current volunteers is invaluable.
- ❖ The club may have invested time, skills and training in the development of volunteers.
- ❖ Retainment ensures that the continuity of the club ethos is maintained.
- ❖ The loyalty of the volunteers is vital to the club, especially during difficult periods or when involved in a large fund-raising campaign.

how do we keep them once we've found them?

It is vital that we understand the reasons why people volunteer, so that we can ensure we do the right things to retain them in our clubs. Many volunteers will tell you the reason they volunteer is to 'give something back', but what else do volunteers want from the volunteering experience?

- ❖ They want to feel part of the team.
- ❖ They want to meet new people.

- They want to feel welcome.
- They may want skills and/or training opportunities.
- They want to be recognised for their role.
- They want to feel useful and valued.
- They want experiences for a CV or an award they are looking to achieve (eg a Duke of Edinburgh Award, Step into Sport, etc).

You need to think carefully about how you can ensure volunteers are getting something out of the experience, as well as giving something back to the club/community.

the first few weeks (or minutes if they are event volunteers!) after recruitment

This is a vital time in the retention of volunteers and even the smallest club should have an induction process which provides all volunteers with information about the club structure, contacts, who will help them over the first few sessions, their responsibilities (a role outline), club policies (child protection, code of practice, etc), details of how to claim expenses, etc. This is often called a 'Welcome Pack'. It will also help with the integration of the new volunteer if they have a 'buddy' who will support them over the first few weeks and, where possible, if they aren't left to volunteer on their own.

Don't assume that people who have been players at the club know about how it runs or the range of volunteer roles – ensure that they also have a supportive induction into the team.

communication

It is vital to communicate clearly with all of your volunteers. Nothing frustrates a volunteer more than not being kept up to date or 'in the loop' – it is important to ensure that your volunteer workforce are included in the overall club communications and that the Club Volunteer Coordinator has regular contact with all the volunteers. Top Tips for communication include the following:

- Ensure all volunteers know the phone number/contact details of either a volunteer representative or the Club Volunteer Coordinator (communication should flow two ways and they need to be encouraged to keep in touch with the club, as well as the club keeping in touch with them).
- Hold volunteer briefing meetings (these can be useful once or twice a year, but don't hold them too often).
- Send messages by text and email (particularly popular with younger volunteers).
- Include a volunteer page in the club newsletter.

- ❖ Set up meetings with small groups of volunteers.
- ❖ Set up one-to-one meetings.

A club which doesn't communicate with its volunteers will lose them!

keeping the team motivated

All volunteers, however dedicated to your club, will need help with their motivation. Motivation will be gained in a number of ways and you need to consider why people are volunteering in order to cater for their needs.

Remember – satisfaction comes from doing something you feel is worthwhile and often challenging.

Motivating your team of volunteers will depend on:

- ❖ their enjoyment of the roles
- ❖ the variety and challenge offered
- ❖ the recognition and reward programmes you have in place (see runningsports Top Tips 'Recognising and Rewarding Volunteers' for further information)
- ❖ good communication
- ❖ meeting their needs, as well as those of the club
- ❖ ensuring they feel wanted and valued
- ❖ the provision of skills training and support for them.

skills and training

Skills and training can be a key retention tool. However, it can be a problematic subject when managing volunteers. Some people are keen to develop their knowledge and skills and see volunteering as an ideal way of doing this. Others, however, just want to turn up, do their task and go away again. Skills and training should always be 'sold' as a positive reward for volunteers, although not all will welcome it! Well-trained people will increase the retention of your volunteers, through helping them to focus and feel confidence in their ongoing contribution.

Skills and training sessions can be motivational for volunteers and they can be a great time to communicate with the team. Most people also feel much more secure in their role if they have received some form of training and support on the technical area in which they are involved, even if it is basic information about what to wear, how to manage people at an event, etc.

You can organise skills and training events in a variety of ways:

- Internally – delivered by your own team/staff
 - delivered by an external organisation (eg British Red Cross, runningsports, sports coach UK)*
- Externally – delivered by the external organisations mentioned above and, in addition, national governing bodies, a local college, a private training provider, etc.

* If you are a big club, you may have enough people to bring external organisations in to deliver training at your own site. Alternatively, if you are a smaller club, you could get together with some other local clubs to make bringing someone in more affordable, or send your volunteers to an external workshop or event in the local area.

A first point of contact if you need to organise any training for volunteers is your local county sports partnership (see the end of these Top Tips for contact details). Your national governing body of sport may also be very helpful in guiding you on methods of retaining volunteers.

key areas to help you retain volunteers

The information above has covered some of the main areas you need to think about putting into your Volunteer Action Plan on the subject of retaining volunteers, but, in summary, you need to consider all of the following:

- Provide an induction/welcome pack.
- Set standards, and implement a volunteer code of practice.
- Provide real practical support for volunteers – expenses, specialist clothing, etc.
- Keep people motivated.
- Delegate responsibility throughout your volunteer workforce.
- Ensure all roles are clearly defined, so everyone knows what their responsibilities are and what is expected of them.
- Value people's time – think about times of meetings, etc.
- Team working – most people volunteer to spend time with other people.
- Skills, training and personal development.

Finally, it is important to retain your volunteers for the right reasons. Sometimes, it is the right time for someone to move on or to take more of a back seat. Your club should plan for succession in volunteer roles – it is healthy to have some turnover and you should plan for this as part of your retention policy.

further information and useful contacts

For contact details of your **county sports partnership (CSP)**, visit: www.sportengland.org
Then click on 'Get Resources', 'county sports partnerships', then 'CSP contacts page'.

For contact details of your **national governing body of sport (NGB)**, who will be able to provide you with advice on supporting volunteers, visit: www.sportengland.org
Then click on 'Get Resources', 'Useful Links', then 'governing bodies of sport'.

CSV – Community Service Volunteers

For advice and services related to volunteering, contact CSV:

Tel: 020-7278 6601

Website: www.csv.org.uk

SkillsActive

For information about the volunteer National Occupational Standards (NOS), contact:
SkillsActive

Castlewood House

77–91 New Oxford Street

London WC1A 1PX

Tel: 0207-632 2000

Fax: 0207-632 2001

Email: skills@skillsactive.com

Website: www.skillsactive.com

Volunteering England

Regents Wharf

8 All Saints Street

London N1 9RL

Tel: 0845-305 6979

Email: information@volunteeringengland.org

Website: www.volunteering.org.uk

Volunteering England and volunteer centres can help your club recruit and manage volunteers.

To find your nearest volunteer centre, visit: www.volunteering.org.uk/Local+and+Regional/

For a list of useful publications, visit: www.volunteering.org.uk/managingvolunteers/publications/

Endorsed by

