

The voice of the Voluntary Arts

Recruit!



the experience corps
YOU'VE TRAINED FOR IN ALL YOUR LIFE

VAN / EXPERIENCE CORPS

As cultural organisations we are always looking for more and new ways of encouraging people to take part in the arts and crafts and enjoy themselves. This briefing takes a look at how you can spread the word and involve others in your activities. It is the first of four briefings on volunteering to celebrate Volunteer's Week 2002.

Unlike most information on volunteer recruitment, we will look at recruitment issues from the perspective of cultural volunteers and those involved in managing these voluntary cultural organisations.

What are 'Cultural volunteers?'

Because we take part in our art and craft forms for love, not money, and are giving time to an activity of benefit to society by enriching our cultural life, we can be described as volunteers – cultural volunteers. Cultural volunteers are like volunteers in other sectors in some ways, but unlike them in others. Cultural volunteers are involved in *creating* art or craft eg. they are participating in the creative activity, rather than *doing* a job or offering a service. However, many cultural volunteers ALSO serve on management boards; others do jobs associated with arts activities, such as crowd control at festivals or the lighting for a theatre company.

When we talk about volunteer recruitment in the cultural sector, we are looking for others who already share our interest, skills and experience in our art or craft form to give their support to an organisation designed to serve that interest.

Cultural volunteer recruitment is most likely to be understood by voluntary cultural organisations as 'finding more members'. We will refer to 'members' as shorthand for cultural volunteers, but this doesn't exclude those looking to recruit volunteers without offering membership.

In this briefing we will use the term volunteer to mean cultural volunteer, member and participant as well as voluntary board members or managers supporting arts and crafts activity.

Who are you looking for?

The most important step in any marketing campaign, in this case, looking for new members, is working out *who* it is you are looking for. Marketing doesn't deal with 'the general public.' It is a process specifically aimed at seeking out groups within society who behave in certain ways, live in certain areas, earn a certain level of income and can be described. This is so that companies can find other people just like them. They want to find other people 'just like' their existing customers because the chances are these people will also become customers if they are given the opportunity to try the product. Finding similar types of people stops marketing efforts being wasted on people who will never buy whatever it is on offer, for example because they cannot afford it what's on offer.

Marketing professionals can go into great detail and spend thousands of pounds describing customers and their behaviour for the brands they promote. In the cultural sector we may not be able to commission expensive market research to help us, but we can still help ourselves by trying to draw a picture of our 'customer', in this case a member, using all the information available to us.



Why might we want new members? New blood brings new energy, new ideas and different approaches and makes a lively, creative and growing organisation. This is of great benefit to the members, new and old. Funders too, like to give money to active and dynamic organisations.

Start with what you have

Most organisations will have a database, however simple, of their members, past and present. From your database you will be able to sort your members by age, sex, location and length of membership. As well as compiling simple demographic information (eg 80 per cent of members are women over the age of 60 living within 20 miles of Nottingham), you may be able to identify trends. By looking at the characteristics of those who have been members longest, and those who have only just joined, you may be able to draw conclusions about how your volunteer base is changing. Perhaps volunteers are getting younger, or perhaps they are coming to you from further afield. Identifying trends like these will help you direct your efforts at reaching the right people.

Try and find out as much as you can about your members. Your research can be informal, for example, every time you speak to a member, ask them a few questions to help you in your recruitment drive. When you have collected your information, you will need to reach conclusions about what is *generally* true for your membership.

Just who is your typical member?

- how old are they?
- are they more likely to be male or female?
- do they live alone, with a partner or in a family?
- do they have children?
- how far away from your meeting place do they live? (if local group)
- how would you describe their income/standard of living?
- how did they find out about you?
- what motivated them to join your organisation?

You may be surprised at how similar they are, or you may discover the only thing that unites them is their shared passion for bell ringing, or whatever it is that your organisation does.

What are you offering new members?

Your members will be involved in or participate in your art or craft form, with the support, encouragement and opportunities offered by your organisation.

Think about the benefits you offer. Do members get discounts on products? Do you offer them opportunities to perform? Will they receive materials and information they cannot find elsewhere? Are they helping keep a traditional art or craft form alive for future generations? From a member's point of view, you need to answer the question, 'What's in it for me?'

Your recruitment campaign

Now you know what kind of people you are looking for and where they are most likely to be found. You also know what you can offer them in a way they can understand and relate to. The next step is to devise a strategy.

Set your goal

How many members do you want? What percentage increase would represent success for your organisation? If your organisation is not showing any signs of growth at the moment, or worse, is actually shrinking, think in terms of a 3 to 5 year strategy to build a stronger and growing membership base. For example, you could set your organisation a target of a cumulative increase in membership of ten per cent per annum over five years. Or, you may prefer to have one big push over three or six months. How many new members will justify the effort and make the campaign successful? Your goal needs to be attainable, based on your experience and taking into account your existing track record of attracting new members. It also needs to be time based, with an identified point in time when you can stand back and measure your success.

Keep on track

If you are keeping good records of contact you have with potential new members you will probably know how many enquiries you need to turn one of them into a member. This may be a ratio of 2:1 or 4:1 or if you are fantastically good at recruitment, 1:1.



Your enquiry to membership ratio will give you a way of measuring your progress. You will be able to see if you are generating enough enquiries each month to reach your target.

If you haven't kept a record of your enquiries it is a good idea to start recording them, to help you monitor your progress.

Equal Opportunities

Looking for volunteers like the ones you have is a sensible approach to recruitment, with one proviso: if you don't look beyond your existing group you could become a clique, or be seen to be excluding others on purpose. Make sure your recruitment campaign isn't discriminatory in any way. Publicise your group well, work across cultural boundaries and be prepared to welcome new members who aren't 'just like you.'

Every organisation should have an equal opportunities policy. These are often quite simple to write, but mean little unless the organisation is committed to implementing its policy positively. At its simplest, an equal opportunities policy is a statement by the organisation saying that it does not and will not discriminate directly or indirectly in employment practises, decision-making, volunteering opportunities or in-service provision on the basis of personal differences other than suitability for the job.

Equal Opportunities policies can also include a statement about how your organisation takes positive action to recruit members from all cultural and religious backgrounds and does not discriminate on the basis of personal differences. Positive action involves encouraging less well represented groups, for example the black, gay or disabled members of the community, to volunteer with you. For an arts organisation ignoring the range of cultural experience available within your community or within the wider culture of Britain is missing an opportunity for a wealth of creativity, expertise, experience and cross fertilisation of ideas.

(see VAN Briefing 45 – *How do I create an Equal Opportunities Policy?*)

Create your campaign

Your message

Getting your message right is essential for a good recruitment campaign. A good message grabs attention and speaks directly to your potential new members in a way they can easily understand. This results in them contacting you and signing up! Your message brings together your benefits with a call to action. How you do it is up to you, but to get some ideas start looking at ads and asking yourself why they work and why they don't.

Do your research! If you are recruiting an audience you are not familiar with, for example, young men and you are a middle-aged woman, then go out and buy the magazines they read. See what you can learn about them through the ads that have been designed for them. What can you copy? What language is being used? What images? You can do this with any of your target audiences – there are always magazines designed for specific parts of the market, with sometimes very subtle differences – in targeting income groups, for example.

Use brainstorming to help get your message right. This technique is useful in many different situations where a fresh viewpoint is needed, and is ideal for generating ideas for your message. Remember, with brainstorming never dismiss an idea straight away. Criticism is not allowed! Keep all contributions and then go through them later in a different session where you discuss the pro's and con's of each.

Finally, there are two essential components of your message you cannot do without. They are **your offer** and the **call to action**.

Your offer

Your offer communicates benefits, sometimes with a specific offer to entice the reader to read on and find out more about you. Do you need more members? Well, you may, but don't say so! Instead tell the reader what they will get from you. If it's hours of endless fun, tell them. If they will meet like minded people, tell them. They want to know, '**what's in it for me**', so tell them!

Call to action

After you've told them what's on offer, tell them how to get hold of it. Make contacting you easy. Give your contact telephone numbers, but make



sure there is someone there to take calls, or an answer phone on to take messages (and then make sure you call enquirers back). Your address is essential when you ask people to send something back to you, for example, a coupon. If you do this, you can add a code to the coupon or form that lets you know where it was from. Then you can gather useful information to help your recruitment efforts in the future.

Communicating the message

You know the kind of people you are looking for, so now, put your antennae up and start looking for good and novel ways to get to those you want to reach. For example, if they buy supplies at a particular kind of shop, see if you can leave leaflets on your organisation next to the till. Be creative, and be prepared to ask people to help you. You may be able to offer them a new audience for their service or product if your target audience match is good and so strike a deal that saves you both money.

Finally

A good campaign may take time to put in place. Being systematic in your recruitment will bring instant rewards. Looking for new ways to reach people and effective ways to grab attention and get your message across will make the difference between business as usual and 'Wow, we're up 30 per cent on last year!'

Best of luck and enjoy your success!

Resources

www.volunteering.org.uk

National Centre for Volunteering. Up to the minute information on all aspects of volunteering, including plenty of good information on volunteering good practice.

www.ivr.org.uk

Institute for Volunteering Research. Lots of information, including research reports to download.

www.volunteersweek.org.uk

Everything you need to know about volunteers week, what's happening, where and how you can take part. Includes a useful section on ideas, with files to download on recruitment issues, amongst others.

The Craft of Copywriting

Alistair Crompton. Hutchinson Business Books
ISBN 0 09 168031 X

Copywriting, for creative advertising

Jonathan Gabay. Teach yourself books
ISBN 0 340 654775 5

www.volunteertoday.com/recrui.html

www.diversitychallenge.org

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