



Toolkit for involving older black and minority ethnic volunteers

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INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is for organisations that are interested in attracting and working constructively with a broader range of volunteers, specifically from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities.

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1. BACKGROUND

There is a well-established tradition of volunteering among BME communities in Britain, ranging from service delivery through faith groups and community groups, to the activities of political pressure groups seeking to challenge racial inequalities. In many countries outside the UK, helping, community support and looking after your extended family and neighbours, is central to people's everyday lives. The understanding of what the term 'volunteering' means in UK society varies between different cultures. Certainly much of the support extended from older people within BME groups may not be registered as formal volunteering.

A number of national research studies have pointed to the relative low levels of formal volunteering by people from BME communities within mainstream voluntary organisations, including significant under-representation of BME trustees within these organisations.

A diverse voluntary organisation is one where service users, employees, volunteers and trustees differ in terms of their ethnicity, age, gender, disability and sexuality. Such diversity of backgrounds brings with it significant benefits to mainstream voluntary organisations. In particular, service provision is more effective through;

- being more able to understand and respond effectively to the needs of your local community
- being more relevant to the local community, leading to new service users, customers, staff and a greater pool of potential volunteers
- receiving fresh ideas and approaches from people from differing backgrounds, cultures, genders, ages and outlooks
- being more representative of wider society.

The following points aim to encourage your organisations to take steps towards including more older volunteers from BME communities.

2. BEFORE YOU START

Mainstream organisations can increase their chances of attracting volunteers from BME communities by:

- demonstrating a clear commitment to equality of access and provision of their services (older volunteers will want to help you work effectively with people from their own communities)
- creating an environment where BME volunteers feel comfortable¹ (ie think about prayer provision; food requirements; creating a less formal setting, offering language support if necessary, offering mentoring)
- asking the volunteer if they would talk about their customs and whether these influence the type of volunteering they take on or the way in which they would like to volunteer (including provisions that the organisation may need to make).

Voluntary and community organisations hoping to attract older volunteers from BME communities need to take on board the diversity that exists within individual communities. The term BME conceals a host of differences including those related to culture, religion, gender, age and socio-economic status. There also may be other differences in attitudes, customs and practices between different generations within the same community, meaning that some BME community groups may have the same issues in ensuring that older people are involved. BME communities are not a homogenous group.

¹ Many volunteers from BME communities have commented that they find it easier to spend time helping own community where they do not have to make special requests such as prayer facilities and specialist food provision and people can share experiences and offer support.

Working with local communities

- Be aware of the different ethnic groups and demographic make up (available from the Census) and organisations in your local area.
- If you want to work more closely with BME communities in your area, it will be helpful to meet representatives from community groups. This will give you a greater understanding of the issues the groups face and how your organisation can link into or support existing initiatives.
- Acknowledge diverse religious and other festivals and holidays when you arrange events or contact groups. Ask the groups about what events you need to have in your calendar.

Organisational practice

- Ensure that you have an effective equal opportunities policy and that this is fundamental to the operation of your organisation. For instance are your services provided to individuals from BME communities? Are you employing workers from BME communities?
- Ensure that there are mechanisms to implement the policy and ongoing monitoring of the policy.
- Always provide training on equal opportunities/diversity as part of induction and ongoing training for all volunteers, paid staff and committee members.
- Look to share knowledge and resources with other organisations, such as training, equipment and volunteers.
- Take into account any needs of volunteers relating to faith and culture when putting processes for volunteering in place and agreeing the budget, eg same gender training; breaks for prayers, specific dietary needs; accessibility of written and verbal communication; childcare for people caring for grandchildren.
- Involve minority ethnic community groups in your policy making and recruitment initiatives.
- Communicate your experiences in managing diversity with other organisations and encourage them to do the same - learning from successes and sharing good practice.

3. RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

- Volunteering is seen differently within different cultures. Informal volunteering or helping is often seen as part of everyday life within BME communities and is not necessarily seen as an organised activity that takes place within an organisation or similar setting. As such you will need to think carefully about the image of your organisation and the image of volunteering that your organisation portrays.
- Volunteering as a concept, does not exist within the mindset of many older people within many BME communities. Therefore, a lot of good work that takes place within BME communities is excluded from the statistics. In some cultures the term 'volunteering' may be perceived as having formal links to the military or government. Try using the word helping instead.
- Many BME communities will respond to community development initiatives run at a local level. Word of mouth is a very useful recruitment tool. It is likely to succeed in recruiting volunteers from similar backgrounds. This means that 'champions' from specific communities or community leaders are key in gaining support from a wider section of that particular community.
- It is important that your organisation is not seen as too bureaucratic, eg detailed application forms may prove difficult and off-putting to individuals whose first language is may not be English; formal interview processes etc.

Community development approach and social networks

This is likely to be the most effective recruitment tool.

- Identify people from within the communities from which you wish to recruit and ask them to support you in recruiting volunteers. (From here on in we will refer to them as "community champions").
- Work with the community champions to understand where people go within that community and what kind of roles they may be interested in.
- Create a number of opportunities that meet the needs of your organisation and which people from within the communities may be interested in.
- Create the opportunity to talk about these opportunities face-to-face with community groups and with individuals.
- Show value for the work that people from the community put in – if you normally pay your recruiters, you should pay your community champions. If they are normally volunteers, they can remain unpaid.
- Ensure that the environment that volunteers once recruited are entering is as conducive as possible to them staying and enjoying their volunteering role – ie think through the attitudes of the other people they are working with; any dietary or religious requirements etc.
- Have publicity materials that you can leave with people for them to further consider in their own time.

Publicity materials

- Ensure your publicity material includes positive images or photographs that reflect people from diverse ethnic groups. (Volunteering England's image bank carries a wide variety of photographs and images - www.volunteering.org.uk/imagebank).
- Use the words "helping/helper" to replace or partly replace the terms "volunteering/volunteer" in your publicity materials.
- Use welcoming and reassuring language and avoid jargon.
- Ensure all publicity material refers to your commitment to equal opportunities.
- Emphasise the good practice issues within your organisation – such as payment of 'out of pocket' expenses; support with transport.
- Highlight the varied roles for volunteers and point out the benefits of volunteering within your organisation – such as friendly atmosphere, flexible approach, training and ongoing support.
- Remember that that different people are attracted by different messages – many organisations have found that emphasizing the element of fun has increased the number of people that come forward.
- Recognise that many people may want to volunteer to help others but may lack the confidence to approach your organisation – in such instances ensure that you emphasise that their experience is of great value and as far as possible go out to places where they will be and encourage them face to face.
- Provide publicity material and information in different community languages (or be able to provide information on where this can be found). Always get any translations double checked, just as you would proof-read any document. Sometimes words can lose their original meaning – in particular where there is no direct translation (for example some languages don't have a word for 'volunteering').

Advertising

- Look to find out about any informal networks that already exist among local BME communities and use these as a way to advertise any volunteering opportunities.
- Think about target audiences you want to reach and where they might go – community centres running key skills or English classes, culturally specific community centres, places of worship (churches, mosques, synagogues, temples), local shops, cafes, clubs, libraries, colleges (including Adult Education), gyms etc.
- Use staff and volunteers to Advertise in ethnic minority media, eg The Voice, Eastern Eye, Irish Times etc.
- Printed material may not be the best way to reach your target audience. You may want to consider producing information on tape, video or talking to the local/community radio station.
- Try to work out what would hook the audience you're trying to reach. If people are feeling isolated, the fun and socialising benefit to volunteering is worth stressing.

First contact

- The first contact is vital to get right. This is often the time when most people that are interested can be put off.
- Interview informally and think about how to appear less bureaucratic (ie the way that you are sitting in the room; offering tea or coffee and introducing the individual to other people; sharing information about the organisation; asking people about themselves and what they are looking to get out of volunteering.)
- Ask if people need an interpreter; an individual's first language may not be English.
- Allow people to participate in their own way, rather than pigeonholing them into certain volunteering opportunities. Try and establish from them what they would like to be involved in and see if you have anything suitable.
- If the role entails a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check, be sure that you explain clearly what the check is and why it needs to be done. Give people the opportunity to ask anything they would like.
- Have a process in place to monitor your advertising and your interviewing. Check if volunteers from different cultures are taking up opportunities and if not, look at your actions again to see what it is within the process that is putting people off. Talk to the people that have not taken up opportunities to monitor what it was that put them off.
- Match those who have put themselves forward to a suitable volunteering opportunity, and refer anyone who cannot be placed to another organisation (ensure you are aware of voluntary opportunities in BME communities).

It can be very difficult to turn down people who want to volunteer, but if they don't match the roles that you have identified, then neither the volunteer nor your organisation will benefit. If you can't offer a suitable opportunity to a willing volunteer, try to signpost them on to another organisation who may welcome their support – volunteer centres may be able to help you.

4. SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS

Look at developing a less structured environment to help people feel as comfortable as possible.

Induction

- How are you going to make sure that volunteers are welcomed into the organisation?
- Are they equipped with all the information and skills they need?
- Don't over face people with too much information/rules and regulations.
- Explain to people who they can talk to if they are concerned about anything. Explain what the organisation's commitment to equal opportunities means and try

and ensure that people have the opportunity to ask for anything specific that they may need.

- Flexibility of role – allow for development from informal to formal volunteering, eg someone arriving as a volunteer or helper, but then develops their role through contact and experience of working with organisation.
- Try not to make assumptions about individuals needs as volunteers, ask them.

Supervision and support

- Provide regular support to both individual and group.
- Recognise that an individual's reasons for volunteering may affect the manner in which you should provide supervision.
- Provide a variety of volunteering opportunities, and give volunteers the chances to change roles to keep motivation and interest.
- Be proactive in ensuring that you routinely provide expenses to ensure that volunteers are not left 'out of pocket', eg travel and childcare. It is important that the organisation is pro-active in ensuring all volunteers are receiving expenses regularly - in some cultures it may feel rude to ask for their expenses if they are not routinely given. As far as possible they need to be given in cash. Some people can be operating on very low incomes. Where expenses cannot be currently paid ensure these are included into any new projects, funding bids etc.
- Basic provisions – out of pocket expenses and childcare facilities. Ensure that there is scope to thank volunteers for their contribution and recognise their efforts. Talk to people about what sort of recognition they would value.
- Have a scheme in place to recognise volunteer contributions in a non-financial way, eg recognition, social events or certificates.
- Think about how to create an informal reliable network of support among volunteers and between volunteers and the volunteer co-ordinator.
- Seeking to retain volunteers – ensure that the volunteer is given a challenging tasks to match their skills and abilities and remember that this may change over time.

Training

- Identify what training volunteers need and want.
- Ensure that volunteers are provided with a comprehensive and personally useful programme of training (this indicates that volunteers clearly valued within your organisation).
- Look to use trainers from BME communities.
- Ensure that your training reflects the cultural needs of your volunteers, eg female only training courses.

- Look for opportunities to include volunteers in delivering your organisations training – either internal training or to other audiences.
- Ensure that all staff and committee members in your organisation receive training in equal opportunities and diversity.
- Training – training for volunteers within BME communities is lacking. Projects themselves do not have the resources to provide sufficient training and cannot afford to send volunteers to mainstream training, which is often inaccessible both financially and geographically. Think about whether you could extend your training to other people within community organisations – they may wish to volunteer with your organisation at a later date.

Dealing with problems

- Ensure that any complaints or grievances are dealt with immediately. Sit down and talk through the problem as soon as possible. Record what has happened and think through what to do next with the volunteer themselves.
- Where necessary refer to equal opportunities and complaints or grievance procedures.
- Complaints can often highlight weaknesses in policies and procedures – be prepared to challenge your organisations procedures.
- Regularly review your organisations policies that effect volunteers (volunteer policy, supervision etc) – ensure they reflect key areas of review, encouragement, appreciation, thanks and training.

Moving on from the organisation

- Provide exit interviews to volunteers leaving the organisation to gauge reasons for leaving which the organisation can learn from.
- Look to help the volunteer find other voluntary work.

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