

APPENDIX J

Roles for Volunteers

Introduction

The main responsibilities in most groups are outlined below. In many groups two or more of these posts are rolled into one, but it is important not to overload anyone. Keen volunteers don't need lots of skills to start with, there is lots of training out there to help volunteers who are running community groups.

Your group may not like the idea of giving people titles, which is a traditional way of running a group, but this is a decision for you and your group to make. All these tasks have to be done by someone but it is unlikely that you will ever have a committee with twelve or more people! If you set up a structure that feels right and does the job, there is every likelihood that your group will flourish. Remember that continuity is essential and an effective structure can make sure that handing over to a new co-ordinator goes smoothly. You may not need to do all these things when you start; begin with a co-ordinator, treasurer and someone to keep records.

Co-ordinating the group

The co-ordinator's role is first and foremost responsibility for your group. She or he needs to know what everyone else is doing and to think ahead. A key role is also leadership – setting a positive example to the rest of the group, which may involve being the person who turns out at unsociable hours on wet mornings! The most important role, however, is co-ordination. This means encouraging other people who have taken on responsibility to carry out their duties and ensuring that everything is ready for project work and meetings. The co-ordinator should also gauge direction. This goes well beyond making sure there will be projects to do when the current ones are finished. It is always important to be thinking: "What should the group be doing in a year's time? How do we get there? What kind of training and equipment do we need?" Last but not least, the co-ordinator should ensure that when he or she leaves, the group and committee can continue to be successful. A good co-ordinator will already be training someone to take over.

Treasurer – doing the books

This is one of the most important posts in your group. If correct accounts are not maintained, you may end up with arguments over who is owed what, or worse still, not knowing how much money you have. As more groups become charities, the legal and financial duties become more important. The basic task is keeping the accounts, which may also involve working with clients and fundraisers. The treasurer should be closely involved with your group and be in regular contact with your chairperson.

Fundraising

This post is sometimes confused with that of treasurer but the two are very different. A good fundraiser needs to be assertive and quite happy to ask all sorts of people and organisations for money. Enthusiasm is more important than experience, since there are plenty of books and training available for this work.

Keeping membership records

To function as a group, you need to know who your volunteers are and where they are. This is a relatively routine but vital job that involves keeping membership lists up to date. As with the treasurer, a well-organised person, who preferably likes filing, would make the ideal candidate. This person could also take responsibility for minute taking at meetings.

Looking after tools

As your group acquires tools, so this role becomes ever more important. The job includes maintenance of tools, ordering new ones and keeping a close eye on where they all are.

Organising practical work

Someone in the group should be responsible for all the project work. This involves planning and overseeing the work, sorting out safety and permissions, organising materials and making sure that a sufficient number of volunteers turn up to do the work. They may be responsible for leading on the day, or may simply liaise with the leader.

Organising transport

If your site is far enough away from people for them to need transport to get there you might want to co-ordinate car sharing. This can be helpful to new volunteers who don't have transport of their own.

Looking after refreshments

This is a popular post in many groups and is a good one for new volunteers. It involves being responsible for getting refreshments such as tea, coffee and fruit juice for project work. The person should also be responsible for organising hot drinks, whether made on site, brought along in thermos flasks or kept hot on a camping stove. Food is a great way of rewarding a group and building a team. It can be a good way to involve people who can't do the practical work. In some groups older members who can't manage to get out and dig holes any more love to make cakes for the workers in the group.

Doing the publicity

This involves recruiting volunteers and letting people know what your group is doing. This might be done by producing a newsletter, putting posters up in the local area or putting a noticeboard on your site. This person should work closely with your co-ordinator on press work or perhaps with the newsletter editor, if this is a role undertaken by someone other than the publicity officer.

Organising training

This could be work for two or three people, by the main responsibility of the job is to let people know what training is available and to organise it. The role also involves maintaining files of educational materials, and looking after slide, posters and displays.

Enjoying yourselves

Social activities should be an integral part of your group but they won't happen on their own. It's important to find someone for this job who likes socialising, but make sure he or she is also a methodical organiser. Badly run social events can do a group's morale a lot of harm.

Marketing officer

If you want to broaden the appeal of your group it may be worth having someone take on this role, which could involve attending environmental network meetings, giving talks and generally helping the co-ordinator and publicity officer keep the group's profile high. It would also involve the selling of any publicity merchandise, such as t-shirts and car stickers and could be an extension of the publicity officer's work.

Networking

If you want to broaden the appeal of your group it may be worth having someone take on this role, which could involve attending environmental network meetings, giving talks and generally helping the co-ordinator and publicity officer keep the group's profile high.

Running a website and using e-mail

Many groups now choose to have their own website, or a page on the local environment network's site. They can post details of minutes and programmes on it. Websites need quite a lot of work to keep them up to date so make sure whoever does this has got time to keep on top of it. Some groups also use e-mail to send their newsletter out to members who are happy with this; it can save paper, time and the cost of stamps.