

Guidance note:

Developing the role of Volunteering Champions

The information in this paper is drawn from *Fresh thinking: An exploration of the role of social network services in supporting volunteering; improving the support for volunteer led volunteering; and developing the role of Volunteering Champions* which is available to download from www.improvingsupport.org.uk/volunteering

Background

We have identified that there are a number of different ways in which the term Volunteering Champion is used: peer led recruitment and support for organisations; championing volunteering at senior and governance levels within organisations; and championing volunteering at a strategic level. Examples of each of these in action are given in *Fresh thinking*. However, we have found little evidence of widespread adoption of any of these; rather we have discovered that the confusion about what a Volunteering Champion is in itself causes confusion. We explored the perceptions that volunteers, Volunteer Managers and Volunteering Champions have of the role; and identified reasons why it has not developed further.

We concentrated on the role of Volunteering Champions at a strategic level – the concept proposed by the Commission on the Future of Volunteering. We looked at what the volunteering movement would want from Volunteering Champion schemes and identified areas that need further consideration as the development of these are piloted over coming years.

In summary, *Fresh thinking* concludes:

- There needs to be a consensus on what a Volunteering Champion is and what a Volunteering Champion aims to do
- Although a significant number of concerns about Volunteering Champion schemes have been raised; many of these can be resolved with greater clarity about what a Volunteer Champion scheme is and who is involved
- The potential for an online network of Volunteer Champions has been identified

Strategic Volunteering Champions in action in Westminster

Westminster City Council launched its *Volunteering Strategy 2008-16* in June 2008 with the aim of increasing the number of people volunteering in Westminster, to improve the capacity of organisations in Westminster to involve volunteers and to improve the co-ordination of volunteering in Westminster. Volunteering Champions are emerging in various forms through this:

- Westminster City Council Chief Executive Mike Moore is actively promoting volunteering at a high level and is supportive of work being done to achieve the aims set out in the strategy
- One project currently being developed is the Westminster City Council Employer Supported Volunteering Scheme – this project will enable staff to undertake volunteering activity in work time and will involve recruiting Volunteering Champions in each service department to promote the role and benefits of volunteering to colleagues

The Policy Team at Westminster City Council works towards delivering actions arising from the Volunteering Strategy, championing volunteering internally and with external partners. Delivering the Volunteering Strategy enables the Team to champion volunteering and ensure the links are made where appropriate to promote volunteering opportunities.

The Team is working towards promoting volunteering as a means to support small and medium enterprises, third sector organisations and people entering or re-entering the job

market. It is anticipated that these projects will deliver some tangible results over the coming months.

Within Westminster City Council, the concept is likely to be developed to refer to a team of 'Champions' who will promote volunteering amongst colleagues. The emerging Volunteering Champions in Westminster believe that a virtual 'Volunteering Champion Network' could be useful to share ideas and information about volunteering and best practice in promoting volunteering and engaging volunteers.

What to think about when setting up a Volunteering Champion scheme

Volunteering Champion schemes are currently under-developed, and it is therefore difficult to provide detailed guidance. The work that Modernising Volunteering will do over the coming two years will lead to this being produced. In the meantime, here are some things to consider:

- Consultation
Ensuring that you have good knowledge about what is required for your situation therefore conducting a simple consultation exercise will solve this as well as provide some initial publicity for the scheme
- Clarity
It is important to be clear about which model is best for the organisation or geographical area right from the offset; this includes providing a widely agreed definition of 'volunteer' for all stakeholders within the scheme
- Requirements
Make sure the role description and person specification are clear and well researched as well as the time commitment and any other requirements and ensure there appear in recruitment advertising
- Communication
This is important especially if there are multiple Volunteering Champions working across a local authority area or organisation; networking with other Volunteering Champions will also have the benefit of reducing isolation
- Publicity
In order to have maximum impact the Champion scheme should be widely publicised and regularly evaluated for its impact on policy and service delivery
- Training and Support
Ensure that there is a designated source of ongoing support for the Volunteering Champion(s) as well as induction and ongoing training
- Information
If signposting is part of their role, the Volunteering Champion(s) will need access to all the relevant information and data; this will need to be regularly reviewed and updated

What Modernising Volunteering is doing on this until March 2011

- We have commissioned Warwickshire County Council to develop a pilot Volunteering Champion scheme in order to explore the gaps in knowledge identified in our research
- We will prepare and publish a detailed case study from the pilot, and publish interim case studies during the life of the pilot
- Seek to identify/develop and promote/publish further case studies about Volunteering Champion schemes¹
- Update this guidance note and publish it online

¹ If your organisation has, or is developing, a strategic Volunteering Champion scheme and wishes to contribute to this activity, please contact georgina@redfoundation.org