

Public Involvement Volunteers

Engagement range	Inform/Consult
Difficulty level	Medium to Hard
Cost	Low (up to \$1,000)
When might you use it	To showcase product, plan, policy To communicate an issue
Number of people required to help to organise	One - three people
Time to organise	Medium (six weeks to six months)
Size of audience	Large (over 30)
Issues/resources to think about	Staff; Telephones; Computers/printing; Trainers in the skills or knowledge needed by volunteers
Innovation level	Low

Description

Public involvement volunteers are people from the community who are temporarily enlisted to assist in developing and implementing a public involvement program. These volunteers can take on various roles according to the nature of the participation program (e.g. they might show people around a facility or site, hand out or letterbox drop information brochures, engage passers-by in a survey, answer telephone queries or undertake a telephone survey).

Public involvement volunteers would normally have an interest in the issue or the community, and be willing to assist. Such volunteers will extend the staffing for an event or outreach without a great deal of additional cost. For example, if dunes are being stripped of vegetation and eroded, a public awareness campaign may be needed to enlist community involvement in planning and acting to revegetate and protect the foreshores.

The volunteers need to be clear about the purpose of the event or process, and to be well briefed at the outset and kept up to date so that they can undertake their work effectively.

Objective

- To expand the available people to staff an event or activity without increasing the budget. However, the volunteers may find that participating increases their skills and knowledge, and therefore there can be a gain for all parties.

Desired Outcome

- Volunteers who are more skilled and informed as a result of participating.

Uses/Strengths

- Public involvement volunteers can help a group or agency who is undertaking a public information campaign or a public consultation process. For example, public involvement volunteers may be enlisted to do the following:
 - Handle general administration (fold, staple, telephone, file)
 - Staff open days or open house
 - Distribute material door-to-door or at meetings
 - Act as a volunteer speakers' bureau
 - Stretch a limited budget
- Having public involvement volunteers can also:
 - Expand possibilities for community participation. More volunteers offer more choices for meeting community groups at a place of their choosing, which increases the number of participants in a planning process.
 - Help the organisation understand community viewpoints.
 - Help the community understand the issue and/or process.
 - Add vigour to the public involvement process.
 - Help assemble a community perspective on a project or program.
 - Add a level of person-to-person communication.
 - Bridge communication gaps.
 - Offer an advantage in eliciting concerns and issues.
 - Help identify people for leadership positions

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- The organising agency or group has less control over unpaid volunteers.
- These techniques do not substitute for professional staff involvement.
- Volunteer loses credibility and standing in the community if things go awry.
- Must allow some training time and costs

Step by Step Guide

1. Plan to recruit and train volunteers before you need them. These may be members of partnership agencies, consultants, researchers, agency board members, local government members, or community residents.
2. Plan what you can achieve with the number of volunteers available. Match your volunteer's capacities to the task they will be given (e.g. those who are confident public speakers could be sent to speak to public meetings or local government representatives). Those with secretarial skills could be allocated to typing information sheets and/or creating databases to record feedback and information received. Those with media skills could work on developing promotional materials. In an open house situation, volunteers can be shown the facility or site and key issues explained so that they can effectively usher community groups around the site.
3. Organise training for your volunteers, which should be simple and should continue throughout the campaign or event, as new information or issues are discovered. Training may include: public speaking practice and feedback, meeting facilitation, media liaison, writing reports, entering data.
4. Appoint a coordinator for volunteers. This person will be responsible for liaising with volunteers to ensure they are clear what is expected of them, when and where. This person would be the central information point for further queries, or for letting organisers know if a volunteer cannot do what they have undertaken to do.
5. Provide a budget for volunteer work which includes costs of background briefing papers, handouts, transport, accommodation, phone calls made from home, and other out-of-pocket costs incurred by volunteers.