



# Open days and Group Recruitment

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This guidance looks at two kinds of event aimed at volunteer recruitment. Open days allow people to come along and find out about volunteering. Group recruitment is a method for recruiting several people at the same time, usually where a team of volunteers is needed.

This guidance was written with the help of the William Morris Gallery and Historic Royal Palaces, who kindly shared their experiences and formed case studies for each section.

## Group recruitment

### What is group recruitment?

Volunteers are usually recruited to roles individually. They are taken on as and when needed, and go through a separate recruitment process. Group recruitment means recruiting several people at once, generally to act as a team. Rather than individual interviews, group sessions are used to select volunteers.

### Why carry out group recruitment?

A clear reason is time management. Holding two or three recruitment sessions a year can be much less time consuming than several individual interviews.

However there can also be other benefits.

- Applicants get a chance to see what the role will be like. They may get to talk to current volunteers, try out activities, and find out more about your museum.
- A team spirit can be created right from the start.
- You get to see people interact and carry out tasks.

### **What roles are suitable for group recruitment?**

Group recruitment is most suitable for roles where several volunteers are needed, and the demand is to some degree seasonal, or where volunteer placements have a natural lifespan. For museums this is more likely to be front of house roles, such as guides and greeters. Recruitment could be timed to ensure cover for the summer and Christmas periods. Gardening roles may also be appropriate.

### **What resources will I need?**

A common phrase in the volunteering world is that volunteers are unpaid, but not cost free. In a sense that should be expanded to remind organisations that many kinds of resources are required to support volunteers. For group recruitment these will include:

*Money.* The monetary costs should be pretty low, but you may need to pay for posters/leaflets, postage for the information you send out to enquirers, and refreshments for the event.

*Space.* Obviously you need a room large enough to accommodate the attendees. You may also need additional break-out space depending on the activities you have planned.

*Staff.* You need enough staff to lead or oversee activities. It is also sensible to involve the staff who would be responsible for supervising the volunteers once they are in post. This means they are involved in the recruitment decision, as well as being familiar to the new volunteers once they start. For group work you will need one staff member per group in order to properly evaluate the participants.

*Volunteers.* You may wish to have current volunteers involved. They could talk about their experiences – it's always more powerful to hear from someone who has already been carrying out a role.

*Refreshments.* Tea, coffee and biscuits are always welcome.

*Time.* Although in the long run group recruitment is less time-consuming, you will still have to set aside time to advertise for the recruitment days, plan activities, respond to enquiries and follow up after the session.

## How do we advertise our recruitment sessions?

There are a number of places to advertise your volunteer roles. Here are some suggestions, but it's also worth brainstorming with colleagues and volunteers – there may be other local opportunities to promote volunteering.

*Website.* Many of us look to the internet as our main source of information. Make good use of your website to give full details of the group recruitment sessions and the roles you have available. If you have any influence over the design of the site do try to make volunteering information as easy to find as possible. On many organisations' websites, whether they are museums or voluntary organisations, it takes several clicks before you can even find a link to the volunteering page.

*Information for visitors.* People who visit the museum are by definition already interested in your work, so it makes sense to let them know there is the opportunity to volunteer with you. A poster or leaflet is all that's needed to target this captive audience.

*Volunteer centre.* Most boroughs will have a volunteer centre. Sometimes they are part of a larger body often called a council for voluntary service. Volunteer centres act a little like Jobcentres for volunteers, in that they try to match people up with volunteer roles in the area that meet their interests. Allow them some notice of the group recruitment sessions. In general they will be dealing with individuals who approach them and come in for a chat, but they may also have a newsletter or email update. Roles registered with a volunteer centre will also be uploaded to the national online database of volunteering, [www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org).

*Local colleges and universities.* Most will have a student volunteering service or centre, often located in the Students Union or the Careers Service, and a ready-made audience of enthusiastic young people.

*Local press.* Local newspapers sometimes have community pages that you could publicise your recruitment sessions through. Another option is to get a story printed that would publicise the recruitment day, especially if you can work an interesting angle into it.

*Posters.* There are a large number of places to put up posters – community centres, GP surgeries, sports centres, libraries, places of worship, further education colleges – anywhere with a noticeboard. You could ask staff or volunteers who live locally to take posters to put up in their neighbourhoods.

*Local community organisations and partners.* If you have links with local organisations as part of community outreach these are great channels for getting your recruitment message across to a broader range of people.

*Sector resources.* There are museum-specific websites such as the Museum Association's job page which carry volunteering opportunities, although of course such sites are less likely to attract local people.

### **What about people who get in touch well before a group recruitment session?**

Thank them for their enquiry and let them know when the next session will be. You could let them know that unless they object you will keep their details on file and contact them again nearer the time.

### **Information for applicants**

You should be ready to provide information for applicants. People often enquire about volunteering at more than one organisation, or may have other alternative plans in mind for their time, so a swift response shows that you are interested in their offer of help. Information could include the following:

*Role descriptions*, to give an overview of the tasks expected of the volunteers and the amount of time expected.

*Information about the museum*. This does not need to be extensive – it's something you will cover in the recruitment session – but some basic information will let the potential volunteers know more about your work and how the roles will benefit this.

*Information about how the session will run*. The idea of a group recruitment session might be a little scary for some people. Keep the information informal and light. Let the applicants know that the session is as much for them to find out whether they'll be interested in the role as it is about your selection process.

*An application form*. This should not be too complicated – you do not want to put potential volunteers off. Most people's frame of reference for application forms (and the whole application process) is that of paid work, where the goal is to sell yourself.

Where you are recruiting to more than one role a form will give you an idea of how many people are interested in each of them.

Ask about accessibility requirements. For example, an applicant may require large print copies of information and activity materials for the session.

### **How much time do I need to set aside?**

The session should not be over long, unless it is combined with an open day. Kensington Palace (see their case study below) allow an hour and a half for theirs. Two hours would be a reasonable maximum, unless you have a particular reason for a longer session.

You may need more than one session. This could be due to the number of attendees if you need more volunteers than can be handled satisfactorily in one session, or to maximise the number of people who may be able to attend. It makes sense to hold the sessions at times the volunteers would be needed, so you may have one session during the week and one at a weekend for example.

### **What other preparation do I need to do?**

You will need to plan activities and put together the necessary resources for them – case studies/questions, flipchart paper and pens and so on.

Any staff or volunteers involved in the recruitment session need to be briefed about their roles.

You should create name badges/cards – it's important to be able to identify and remember participants afterwards in order to fairly assess them.

Decide how you will select candidates. You may wish to create scoring sheets in advance to assess them against consistent criteria.

### **How should I structure the session?**

This will of course depend on your own needs, but here are suggested elements for an agenda:

#### *Welcome*

Introduce yourself and any staff or volunteers who will be taking part.

#### *Icebreaker*

It's important for everyone to get to know each other and feel comfortable. Icebreaker exercises can be very helpful. The activity should be fun, without putting anyone on the spot.

#### *Introductions*

Everyone should be introduced. It would also make sense to find out a little bit about each person – why they are interested in the role, and what their background is. This could form part of the icebreaker.

#### *Information about the museum and the relevant roles*

Depending on time this could also include a tour of the museum.

Remember that the attendees are unlikely to be familiar with the sector. Jargon and acronyms such as HLF should be explained.

#### *Activity*

The most important section will be an activity for attendees. This is where you will see them work together and be able to judge individual's suitability for the role. See below for suggestions for activities.

#### *Questions*

Allow time for the attendees to ask questions. This could be from an open Q and A session, or if you have time you could put people into groups first to discuss questions or concerns between them –

this will help get people thinking and make it easier for them to raise questions back in the main group.

### *Wrapping up*

Let people know what will happen next:

- When you will let them know if they have been successful
- When induction and training will start, and what they will involve
- What other steps there will be – for example, criminal record checks.

Thank everyone for coming.

### *Other possible elements*

You could end the session with a tour of the museum.

Another option could be the chance for attendees to speak individually and confidentially with staff members.

## **What kind of activity do I need to put together?**

The activities need to be directly relevant to the role, enable everyone to participate, and give staff the opportunity to fairly evaluate all the applicants.

There may be a practical task from the role the attendees could carry out, but in many cases this is not going to be possible, so an alternative would be to create scenarios and ask the group to decide how they will deal with them. For example, for a front of house role you might describe a case study based around a complaint from a visitor.

Think through what responses you are looking for. What issues should the group consider? What actions should they suggest?

Feeding back to the main group is also part of the activity.

For most purposes with group work the staff member overseeing each group should answer questions and clarify issues, but leave facilitation to the group itself, as teamwork is likely to be a key factor in evaluation. How the group organises itself can be as important as the answers it comes up with.

As mentioned above, the number of staff you need will depend to some degree on the nature of the activity, but a good rule of thumb would be a ratio of 1:5. Remember, they are not just supervising the activity – they are also evaluating the group members. In addition, for most activities a group of 5 is a good size to ensure everyone has a chance to input.

## **How do we select volunteers?**

Make a decision as soon as possible after the event. With so many people to consider you will soon start to forget details about individuals and how they acted and interacted.

Selection should be based on clear and fair criteria. This means that staff members looking at different groups are being consistent.

Think about the qualities needed for the role. What is essential? What is desirable? What can be dealt with through training and support?

Recruiting a group together also allows you to see group dynamics. Does one person dominate? Do the group members organise themselves well? Do they help each other?

One consideration is whether the individual would be a better fit for a different role in your museum.

## **Follow up**

Let the applicants know as soon as possible whether they have been successful. Induction and training should start reasonably soon afterwards.

## **Case study - Kensington Palace**

Kensington Palace, part of Historic Royal Palaces, have been using group recruitment since November 2011 for roles such as welcome volunteer where a team of people are needed.

Having seen application forms they invite approximately 15 people to interview, enabling them to work with 3 groups of around 5 people. The intention is not to deliberately whittle this number down – if all the attendees are suitable they will all be taken on.

Their ice-breaker has been to pair up attendees and ask them to find out a few details about each other. People then introduce their partners to the rest of the group.

Small groups are used to work through scenarios based on the roles the attendees are interested in. They allocate 20 minutes to the groups, which then feedback to everyone else.

One potential concern about group recruitment is that it may sound intimidating to potential volunteers. The experience at Kensington Palace has been quite the opposite, with volunteers reporting that they found the idea more welcoming than coming in for an individual interview.

Another interesting outcome is that it has proved successful in attracting more applicants from local BME communities. This does come hand-in-hand with proactive attempts to reach out to such groups, but it also appears that the group aspect of the recruitment has proved less off-putting.

They have found that volunteers settle in more quickly – they have already met each other and relevant staff, and are all starting from the same point.

They have also combined an open day with group recruitment. People could drop in and find out a little more about the Palace and their volunteer roles, then stay on for a group recruitment session if they want to get involved. This approach worked well from a diversity point of view.

An indicator of success is that when asked if, given sufficient resources, they would like to recruit each volunteer individually, they are adamant that they would prefer group recruitment.



# Open days

## What is a volunteering open day?

Open days are an opportunity for people to find out about volunteering with you. They tend to be relatively informal, allowing attendees to drop in at any point. The aim is to attract potential volunteers and give them information about the roles you have to offer and the work of your museum in a setting which is welcoming and without any pressure to commit to giving up their time.

## Why have an open day?

Open days are recruitment tools, but also have wider benefits than simply increasing numbers.

They allow people to find out more about the museum and the role than simply reading a website or an information pack.

They're an easy first step. They don't suggest any form of obligation. Some people may worry about even making an enquiry about volunteering, as they'd feel awkward about then pulling out if they weren't sure about whether to get involved.

They help break down barriers. It can be harder for museums to diversify their volunteers due to stereotypes or preconceptions about museums, the volunteer roles they offer and the kind of people they are looking for.

They help people decide whether volunteering with you will be right for them. In the long run it is better for people to self-select out at this stage rather than take on a role that they are not suited for or happy with.

They can form part of a wider community outreach programme. On an individual level even if people decide volunteering is not for them they will have found out a little more about the museum. Word of mouth can increase visitor numbers – and they may have friends or family who will be interested in volunteering.

## How do we promote our open days?

The group recruitment section has suggestions for promotion that can also be used for open days.

## What preparation do we need?

You need to decide what activities and information will be available for attendees.

All staff and volunteers involved need to be aware of their roles for the day, what information they may need to pass on to attendees and so on.

This is particularly important for volunteers. The activities they carry out may be quite different to their normal roles, or require a different emphasis. For example, a volunteer leading a tour through the museum should be aware that the purpose of this is as much to be able to talk about volunteering as it is to describe exhibits.

### **Can I combine an open day with group recruitment?**

Yes, if group recruitment is suitable for your needs and roles. You could have both on the same day – people could come to the open day to find out more, and stay for the recruitment session if they are interested - or the group recruitment could come soon afterwards.

### **What resources do I need?**

These will be similar to those for group recruitment, but some specific considerations should be:

*Staff and volunteer time.* You will need enough people on hand to run activities, answer questions and co-ordinate the day. If possible staff responsible for directly supervising volunteers should be available, as they can give people information about their roles. Current volunteers can give their experiences too.

*Space.* This will obviously depend on what you have in mind, and what you have available. Much could be carried out in the museum itself if it is not too disruptive. This would also mean that visitors to the museum could get involved if they are interested. If you are offering the opportunity for people to have one-to-one sessions with a staff member to discuss volunteering you should arrange private space. People may want to discuss sensitive issues such as health problems or worries and concerns about volunteering.

### **How do I structure the day?**

People will be dropping in at any time, so you need to structure the day with this in mind. Where there are definite activities – a gallery tour, a presentation by current volunteers and so on – they should be timed at regular intervals and if possible not overlap to allow people to move from one to another.

Someone needs to act as co-ordinator and point of contact on the day. This is to ensure that scheduled activities are running to plan, problems can be dealt with and enquiries answered.

If you will be participating in some activities yourself such as one-to-one chats with potential volunteers it would be sensible to arrange some cover.

The actual content is really down to you. There are some suggestions below, but do use your imagination, and discuss possibilities with staff and volunteers.

### *Information about the museum*

A key element is likely to be regular tours of the museum. These could start at specific times – perhaps meeting at reception on the hour.

It's worth thinking about giving information about the museum in general, not just the exhibits. How is it run? What work goes on behind the scenes? What's it like to work there? This could come through displays, written information, a talk, or an opportunity to talk one-to-one with staff or volunteers.

### *Information about the roles*

Role descriptions should be available for all roles. The real benefit of an open day however is that you can provide an opportunity for people to meet and chat with current staff and volunteers. Hearing first-hand accounts and being able to ask questions has much more of an impact than some written information.

### *Activities*

It would be good to capture people's attention with something fun or informative. This could be a talk – the case study below has an interesting spin on this, with volunteers interviewing each other in front of an audience. Another option might be simple tasks that people can get involved in, giving a taste of what they might be doing as part of a role.

### *A chance to ask questions*

The option to talk to a member of staff or volunteer would be very useful for people thinking about volunteering.

This could be through drop in sessions, or by booking time slots.

### *How to get involved*

If people are interested in volunteering you need to make the next steps clear and easy. If you use application forms they should be readily available – you may also provide help or guidance on filling them in. Some people find forms intimidating, especially if they are worried about a lack of qualifications or previous experience.

There should be information on the rest of the process. Typically this may be that applicants will be invited in for a chat/informal interview, that for some roles criminal record checks may be needed, and that you have a training and induction programme to help new volunteers settle into their role.

### **Follow up**

If all goes well you will have a number of applications and enquiries coming in after the open day. Try to set aside time to deal with these quickly and efficiently. This helps show that you appreciate the individual's offer of help, and that

Relevant staff will also need to be available for interviews, and ready to induct and train a new intake of volunteers.

## **Evaluation**

You should evaluate the success of your open days. How you do this will depend on your resources and what you wish to learn.

A clear measure would be the number of attendees who then apply to volunteer with you. You may also want to gauge whether the quality of applications has risen as well – for example, a greater percentage of applications are from people who are suitable for the role, as they have had the opportunity to find out more about what it will entail.

A debrief with staff and volunteers involved in the day will help examine how smoothly it ran and if there are any organisational issues to think about for next time.

You could also create a short and simple evaluation form for attendees.

Try to look beyond raw numbers. The success of an open day is not just about the number of volunteers you recruit directly following the event. For example, publicity for the museum and an increased number of visitors who will have learnt more about your work are positive results too. In the longer term, even if some people do not decide to volunteer straight away, they may choose to at a later date, or recommend your opportunities to friends and family.

## **Case Study - William Morris Gallery**

The William Morris Gallery undertook an ambitious redevelopment in 2012. As well as changing the structure of the building this HLF funded project was intended to increase and diversify visitors and involvement from the local community.

Volunteering is a key factor in community engagement, so the Gallery wanted to take steps to open up recruitment as broadly as possible. They already attracted large numbers of volunteers but these tended to be people already familiar with museums, commonly retired experts and enthusiasts or those seeking a career in the sector. They wanted to broaden this to include people who are new to museums or to volunteering, specifically people who want transferable skills to help them secure employment and more people who are representative of the diverse local community who might volunteer alongside employment in another sector.

Open days were seen as a good step towards breaking such barriers. They hold them every 6 months, with 2 at a time in order to maximise the potential number of attendees.

Their open days involve a mix of formal and informal activities:

- Role descriptions for all roles are available for attendees to read and take away.

- Current volunteers are on hand to chat with people interested in giving their time
- Drop-in workshops on filling in application forms, with example forms to take away
- Confidential one-to-ones which people can sign up to at allotted times. These are opportunities for the attendees to discuss volunteering in more depth. They can talk about why they are interested in volunteering, what the experience will be like and so on.
- A 'meet the team' display representing current volunteers with photographs and quotes from them.
- There are gallery tours at regular intervals. These are carried out by volunteers, so the tour is as much about their experience of volunteering as it is the displays.
- Current volunteers also lead question and answer sessions, in which one volunteer interviews another about volunteering in the Gallery. They may talk about a typical day's volunteering, why the person chose to give up their time, what the biggest challenges are and so on. This has proved particularly successful, although of course it is important to select volunteers who will feel comfortable doing this – and not stray too far from messages the Gallery is comfortable with.

Managing the expectations of volunteers has been important. A small number of people coming on a gallery tour should not be seen as disappointing, as they have more chance to interact and ask questions.

The open days have proved successful. Approximately 50-55 people attend each day, with 67 applications coming from the most recent pair of open days.