



The Experience Bank

Practitioners' Briefing



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development



The Community
Foundation for Ireland



Dublin City
Volunteer Centre

Ionad d'Obair Dheonach Cathair Bhaile Átha Cliath

The reflections are based on the The Experience Bank pilot project run by Dublin City Volunteer Centre (DCVC) between September 2021 and May 2022. A detailed project report and brief summary report about the project are also available on DCVC's website. This guide outlines some of the key reflections from the project that could be useful for practitioners and policy makers when designing their programmes, policies and practices around engaging with volunteers aged 55+.

1. Focus on people 55+

There is a definite appetite and need for more targeted projects for volunteers aged 55+. Being part of a specific project creates a clear focus, relevance and sense of community. It means both volunteer and organisation are available and ready to engage within the specific timeframe of the project. Make sure to clearly communicate that both are part of a programme.

2. Value Life Experience

Project participants appreciated the focus on their life experience over and above a large emphasis on their (professional) skills when it came to volunteering. They felt this was more appropriate for their life stage, more inclusive and better suited to reflect them as a person.

3. Choose "The One"

Volunteers in the pilot liked to be "selected" by an organisation as this gave them more self-confidence and made them feel more valued and "wanted". For practitioners, this could just mean using your local contacts or networks to approach people about volunteering, or even asking someone directly to volunteer. If you do, make sure to be specific with the person about why you think they would be a good fit for the role and vice versa.

4. Be specific

A lot of volunteers in this age cohort appreciated a clear outline of expectations and timelines. They tended to plan ahead more than other age groups and liked to know what they are asked to commit to before they made a decision.

A personal conversation creates space for discussing your needs and expectations as an organisation, but also an opportunity to listen to the volunteer's needs and motivation. Try to be specific with your volunteer role description while remaining flexible to be able to respond to the volunteer's needs; you could even try co-designing the role together.

5. Make it personal

Having a personalised experience is key to creating a successful connection between volunteer and Volunteer Involving Organisation (VIO). Make an effort to have a conversation in person or at least over the phone/ video call. This allows for a more focused "selection" process. Volunteers will feel more valued and that they are "seen" for

who they are and what they have to offer. It pays to invest time and resources in a personalised recruitment process for volunteers 55+ as it is much more likely to yield a bigger return and deeper relationship in the long run.

6. Broaden your Perspective

"People 55+" is a huge age cohort with people at many different life stages and a broad range of experiences, interests and skills. They want to feel seen and valued for who they are and what they bring to the table, rather than being stereotyped. This starts with the language and images that you use, but also might require a deeper look at your organisation's culture around valuing older volunteers.

7. Involve Peers

Involving peers in the design of your volunteer programme or setting up an Advisory Panel with peers to support a project or ongoing programme can be hugely beneficial. Having this peers' perspective and a sounding board will ensure you include the voices of the people you are engaging with. You could even consider setting up a Community Ambassador Volunteer Programme as part of your volunteer recruitment efforts. Do structure it well and provide ongoing support and training.

8. Resource the Broker

Brokerage plays a big part in creating successful and lasting connections between volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations. It improves the search and selection process for both the organisation and volunteer: The "broker" or coach can work with the volunteer to identify their interests, motivation, availability, and what they have to offer. This helps focus their search for volunteering opportunities. They can also work with organisations to support them with their role descriptions, expectations and interaction with volunteers. Ultimately, their knowledge of both volunteers' and organisations' needs and expectations enables the broker to create the required links and relationships that lead to strong volunteering engagements. Prospective volunteers and Volunteer Managers appreciate the point of contact, connection and human touch a broker can offer. The role of a broker requires an investment of time and expertise in stakeholder management, coaching and capacity building. There is a need to adequately resource and support this role at local Volunteer Centres to help facilitate inclusion.