

MAKING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES INCLUSIVE

When volunteer opportunities are inclusive, it is easier for people of all abilities to volunteer throughout their lifespans and you make your organization more effective because you have diverse perspectives and talents to pursue your mission. Disability can be experienced by anyone at any time and it is experienced differently by everyone. By learning to recognize barriers to participation and meeting the needs of people who may or will experience disability, you will be able to increase your pool of volunteers, better engage with your community, and provide an environment for all of your volunteers and staff that is inclusive and flexible enough to adapt to changes in abilities and lifestyle. **This fact sheet will help you understand how your organization can recruit and retain volunteers who have disabilities.** Please refer to the *Supporting Volunteerism by People With Disabilities Guidebook* for detailed steps for inclusive volunteering.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Organizations can be more inclusive simply by adjusting the environment or task processes
- Changes to become more inclusive and accessible benefit everyone
- Asking for accommodations, being expected to disclose having a disability or constantly having to for accessibility can become tedious, frustrating, and/or alienating
- You can build an organizational culture where difference is expected as a fact of life rather than viewed as a problem; all it takes is your willingness to start the dialogue!

WHAT CAN YOUR ORGANIZATION DO TO ENABLE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITMENT

- Communicate that you are looking for **volunteers of all abilities** (state that you are an equal opportunity organization) and consider removing identifying information from the review process making skills the focus
- Use **imagery that represents diversity** within your promotional materials such as those at www.photoability.net/ (a for fee photohouse) or search on “diversity,” “disability” or “inclusion” on royalty-free digital photo websites like <http://www.freedigitalphotos.net/>.

If people see images they identify with, then they will view your organization as an inclusive place.

- Actively recruit members of the community with disabilities by **networking with organizations that support people with disabilities**
- Recruit in media/locations (virtual and physical) that are frequented by people with disabilities
- Make sure that your website meets web content accessibility guidelines (use a free checker see <http://wave.webaim.org/> or for information see <https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG20/quickref/>)
- Make it known that you offer **flexible opportunities to volunteer** for your organization (e.g. virtual volunteering, volunteering with a buddy or partner, single task volunteering and regularly scheduled volunteering)

Shifting to an inclusive and diverse attitude takes commitment and time. Diverse volunteers respond to organizations that demonstrate an openness to diversity.

STRATEGIES FOR TRAINING

- Do not plan accessibility of your materials around specific disabilities; instead plan your materials to have multiple ways to be presented and received. For example, instead of captions “for deaf people” use “for people unable to hear the audio” because there are many reasons why audio may not be heard. (e.g.: when audio is hard to hear because of poor sound quality, lack of speakers, or speech with an unfamiliar accent).
- Take advantage of the flexibility of electronic text (it is easily shared, read aloud by a screen reader, enlarged, converted to Braille and adjusted for colour and contrast) and provide training materials and information in accessible digital formats. Learn more about accessible documents at <http://adod.idrc.ocad.ca/>
- Take advantage of freely available and inexpensive audio and video conferencing solutions (such as Skype and Google Hangouts) to enable remote participation in training activities, meetings and volunteer tasks
- Use plain language in training materials and a variety of visuals, text, and verbal explanations during training

STRATEGIES FOR TASK DEVELOPMENT

- **Break tasks into smaller steps** so that they can be tailored to fit people's skills and be shared.
- Consider what tasks or parts of tasks can be carried out by volunteers who want to help from their home(s)
- Divide tasks into primary or essential, and secondary functions, so that you can better match your volunteer resources to available tasks
- Consider online board meetings or conference calls, in order to reduce travel requirements

STRATEGIES FOR VOLUNTEER EMPOWERMENT

- Offer opportunities for people to volunteer in groups or pairs
- Offer flexible time commitments and/or partnering arrangements that will enable individuals with less predictable demands on their time to volunteer
- Empower prospective volunteers by asking how you can support their experience as a volunteer
- Collaborate with your volunteers to find creative solutions to their unique needs
- Provide access to refreshments, a space to relax during breaks and an accessible space to store belongings
- Provide parking or travel stipends
- Provide appropriate disposals for needles
- Ask your volunteers about barriers they are experiencing and look for simple and creative solutions

STRATEGIES FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

- Seek to have people with disabilities serve at all levels of your organization. Consider these questions: Who is on your board? Who is volunteering on the front line? Are you diverse at all levels?

Having people with lived experience of disability within your organization fosters inclusive practices.

- Develop policies and procedures that support inclusion, diversity and accessibility
- Continually set attainable goals for inclusion and evaluate the progress of meeting your inclusion goals.
- Have all volunteers complete an exit interview to learn about their unique experiences

BY IMPLEMENTING THESE STRATEGIES YOUR ORGANIZATION WILL BE ABLE TO ATTRACT DIVERSE VOLUNTEERS AND BECOME MORE INCLUSIVE.