

# Researching Your Project

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## Summary

If you're planning to set up a student volunteering project, there are some key steps that you should take to make sure your project is suitable for your university and community, and to start it off on the best footing to create a sustainable project that makes an impact on your community.

There are different areas that you will need to research, and it's important to think about each of these points when researching your project.

This Information Sheet covers:

- Area/ Type of volunteering
- Need in the community
- Skills – needed or could use for project
- Finance – what money might you need
- Previous projects – what worked or didn't work.

## Area/ Type of volunteering

There are various different areas or types of volunteering that you can do. It is probably best to decide this first as it then makes the next steps easier to achieve. Deciding on an area of volunteering is down to you. It is important that you will enjoy doing your project and feel passionate about the cause, so make sure you choose something you will find fun and interesting. Here are a few areas you could choose:

- Environmental
- People (eg elderly people, young children, youth, homeless people)
- Animals
- Virtual
- One off project vs. ongoing

## **Need in the community**

Before deciding on what your project will be you need to make sure there is a 'need' for your project. There is no point doing something that will neither interest nor help anyone. Your project could be something that helps any number of different groups or communities. Here are a few examples of who your project could benefit:

- Your university
- Your town or city
- A local borough, parish or locality
- A community group or organisation
- A national, regional or local charity group
- A disadvantaged group of people, for example, youth offenders or homeless people.
- A small area, for example a local park or street

Your project could benefit more than one of these groups or areas and in a number of different ways, though it is often best to decide who or what your project will benefit, as this will help in refining your project, making it easier to find the correct volunteers or funding.

There are a number of ways in which you can work out where the need in the community is.

### **Personal Experience**

This is often the most likely way a project will come about and it is always worth keeping an eye out for areas in and around your university that could do with some help from volunteers. For example, you saw the local park has been used as a dumping ground for rubbish and you want to do a project that will help clear this up, or you might know that students with sight disabilities need more support on and/or off campus.

### **Volunteer Support Officer/ Volunteer Co-ordinator**

They may have noticed gaps in areas of volunteering at your university that should be filled or know of projects that have worked in the past but have died out as students have left the university.

### **Other Universities**

It is worth looking on other university Student Union or community websites to see what students are doing in other places as you may find your area could benefit from a similar project.

## **Local and national newspapers**

Look in local news about areas of deprivation, groups that need help etc

Also look in national news for similar problems that could be happening in your local area. For example: an article could talk about low literacy levels in the UK, so you could set up an evening class teaching adults basic literacy.

## **Friends and colleagues**

Ask other people you know about areas they feel could benefit from volunteering.

Local councillor, Student Union President or head of charity/ organisation

Ask people in different sectors or communities where they have noticed a problem that could be helped by a student volunteering group.

There are any number of different people or groups you could ask for advice on where a volunteering group could help and they would probably each give you a large number of ideas. Once you have a few different options and have decided what type of volunteering you want to do, go through each option and decide which one best suits your skills. You then need to check you have the right skills to carry each of the projects out.

## **Skills – needed or could use for project**

It is important to consider what skills you can bring to a volunteer project, as if you use the skills you already have, your project is likely to get off to a good start. For example, if you are a maths student, then maybe you could teach maths to young children or adults, or if you enjoy drama you could put on a drama performance with a local community group.

Your skills may be very broad and in order to volunteer you don't need to know every last thing in the area of your project. Volunteering is equally about the skills you learn in doing your project. Perhaps you would like to learn more about environmental issues, and could do so by setting up a project that benefits your local community and environment?

Whatever the project is that you decide to set up, it is likely that certain skills will be needed from someone. It is worth seeking advice from different people to make sure your project runs smoothly. Your first port of call should be your Volunteer Support Officers who can tell you about health and safety issues and risk assessments etc. They will support you in getting your idea of the ground and should be able to give you most of the advice you need. You might also need more specific advice to your project. For example if running an environmental project you might need to get advice on local recycling schemes or methods of sustainable power. For more specific information you could go to university departments, local or national organisations or the internet.

When advertising your project you can also advertise for students with specific skills, for example if putting on a performance you could advertise for a student volunteer who is knowledgeable in lighting and technical backstage equipment.

## Finance – what money might you need

It is always best to make your project cost as little as possible as it is never easy to find money to set up volunteering projects and it is best to rely more on people's time than actual money.

Here are some places you could apply for funding if needed.

- V cashpoint: <http://www.vinspired.com/opportunities/vcashpoint/>
- Unlimited: <http://www.unltd.org.uk/>
- Awards for All: <http://www.awardsforall.org.uk/>
- Princes Trust: <http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/>
- Green Prints: <http://www.sitatrust.org.uk/apply-for-funding>

You can also look at our funding resources document found on our Student Volunteering Week website.

When deciding on how much money your project would need it is worth thinking about the following categories:

- Transport
- Venue hire
- Equipment hire
- Volunteer expenses
- New equipment
- Prizes/ incentives
- Publicity
- Food/ drink

It is likely that there will only be a couple of these areas that you would need money for, especially if it is a short term project, but it is important to really think about everything you might need money for and do some research into the costs of each of those things, so you can give an accurate budget when applying for funding. Funders will need to know exactly what you require the funding for, so the clearer you make your application the less likely you are to have to keep reapplying.

## Fundraising

It is also possible to raise money for your project through fundraising events.

This will most likely take longer than writing funding applications, but is a really fun way of raising awareness and money for a project. You might still need some money to begin with, but it is worth asking your Students' Union or university if you could borrow some money, that you will pay back once you have fundraised. Here are a few fundraising ideas.

- Give Me Five: Set up tables outside the dining hall, in the student union, or another bustling spot on your campus or in your community. Encourage students, staff, professors, etc to donate £5 towards your project, proving to them who/what you will help or support.
- Collaborate: with a band or a theatre group on campus and put on a show. Don't forget to publicize all over campus and in the community.
- Plates for Peace: Set up a restaurant in a social house, or another available space on campus and get together to cook a meal from a specific country or region. Provide entertainment (music, poetry etc) and request a donation at the door. You may even be able to get funding from your university to pay for the food.
- Cook: Hold a bake sale at campus concerts or plays.
- Organise a raffle.
- Hold a penny war between the different class years and the university staff
- Hold a car wash at a local petrol station.
- Hold a party and charge a fee. Try to get things donated so that all of the money goes toward the cause.
- Is it possible to launch fundraisers during parent or alumni weekends? Check with the university to see if this is allowed.
- Make and sell t-shirts, boxers, or pins
- Have an auction. Auction off your friend for a date or get local businesses to donate their products and/or services.
- Have a bikeathon, a race, or an iron person competition, and get the local community to participate
- Collaborate with student organisations that might be interested in offering you the funds collected through their own fundraisers.

Some of the ideas above are projects in themselves, though can also be changed to be a way of raising money for a much bigger project.

## **Previous projects - what worked or didn't work?**

When deciding on your project it is always worth looking at past projects both at your university and others.

Firstly check there isn't already a project that does what you plan to do, if there is it is likely that your project will be slightly different and you could complement and help each other with resources and ideas.

Ask your Volunteer Coordinator or other volunteer support staff about past projects that are similar to what you are doing and see if they can give you advice on what did or didn't work or give you a contact of someone who was involved in the project.

Look at other university/ Students' Union websites and see if you can see any projects that look similar. You can probably get contact details of staff at other universities from your VSO, so you can get in touch with students at other universities.

Join the Student Volunteers Network (SVN). On the SVN you can contact students from all over the country and ask them of any projects similar they are doing. The SVN could also be useful for general help with your project.

You can ask students in your region or nationally for suggestions and help with your volunteering.

<http://svnetwork.ning.com>

Most importantly you must make sure you enjoy your project and will continue to enjoy it.

This will ensure that your project is as successful as possible, as you will be able to keep up motivation throughout!

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