



# Recruiting and Working with Volunteers

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## The value of volunteers

Volunteers give their time to support an organisation without being paid for it. They usually give their time for free because the work the organisation does is important to them and they are passionate about the cause.

Volunteers are a valuable resource and can contribute their expertise in various ways – from fundraising, to helping with specific projects, to being a member of the Board. They can bring a wide range of experiences, knowledge and skills – as well as bringing energy, ideas and new perspectives. Volunteers can help organisations deliver services more effectively and can help to save money, which is especially helpful in organisations with limited funds or a small number of employees. To help you get started and make your organisation a great place to volunteer, there are some things to consider.

## How could volunteers help your organisation?

Finding the right people to volunteer can really help your organisation be more successful. Before trying to find volunteers, it is important to have a clear idea of the ways you need their support.

It could be useful to think about the following questions and record the answers in a document. If there are a variety of different things you need volunteers to do, it is probably useful to answer these questions for each 'role'.

- What work will volunteers do?
- Is the work project-based activities or ongoing, long-term work?
- How much time is needed from the volunteer?
- What skills, experience or expertise would make a person the ideal candidate?
- How will volunteers work with existing staff?
- What orientation or training is required?

Ideally, a volunteer will have the right skills and experiences to fulfil a specific need in your organisation. For example, a person with financial expertise may be a good candidate to oversee fundraising activities or take on the role of treasurer.

## How to find volunteers

The first place to look for potential volunteers is within the axSpA community. People who share the experience of living with axSpA — patients or caregivers — have an interest in improving the quality of lives of those with the disease. This can make them effective volunteers, who are likely to be educated on the issues, as well as motivated to raise awareness and make change.

Think about the following ways to let your members know you are looking for volunteers:

- Send a 'volunteers needed' email to your membership
- Use social media by putting out a simple 'we are looking for volunteer help' message.
- Feature volunteer opportunities in your organisation's newsletter and on your website
- Make an announcement during events or meetings

Although the best place to look for volunteers is likely to be within the axSpA community, you may also want to consider other options. Students are often looking for opportunities to complete volunteer hours required for school, college or university. You might approach local education establishments to see if this possibility exists.

In some regions, there may also be volunteer portals that link up those looking to volunteer with organisations seeking volunteers.

## Getting the right fit

Getting to know prospective volunteers is important. Even if you already know the person you are asking to volunteer, having a conversation about the organisation and volunteering is essential.

**Their background and interests.** To help assign a prospective volunteer to something suitable, it is important to know their background and understand what motivates them. What are the things they would like to do as a volunteer and what are they not comfortable or interested in doing?

**Understanding what they need.** Does the person feel comfortable working alone or prefer to work with a partner, or as part of a team? Do they prefer guidance from someone more experienced? Do they need more information on the disease or the organisation? Is their time flexible or can they commit only to a set number of hours or to particular times of the week?

**Experience and skills.** Particularly for specific roles, such as a Trustee, it is helpful to draw up a brief job description. This provides a clear picture of the role and responsibilities and enables you to match people with the right skills and experience. However, for all volunteer roles, it is important to understand the knowledge, skills and experience of a prospective volunteer. You need to feel confident that the person can competently perform the tasks you are asking – and the volunteer also needs to be comfortable in the role you are asking them to carry out.

**Time commitment.** Working with a new volunteer initially can take a significant amount of time before they can work more independently. Therefore, it's important to ensure that the work they do outweighs the time you spend training them. Consider asking for a minimum commitment – perhaps 3 months of volunteering once per week, or for them to complete a particular piece of work.

## Supporting volunteers

Finding and retaining good volunteers is not just about what a volunteer can offer your organisation. What your organisation can offer to them is equally important and can also make the relationship mutually beneficial. When looking for volunteers, it is helpful to talk about what they will gain by giving their time.

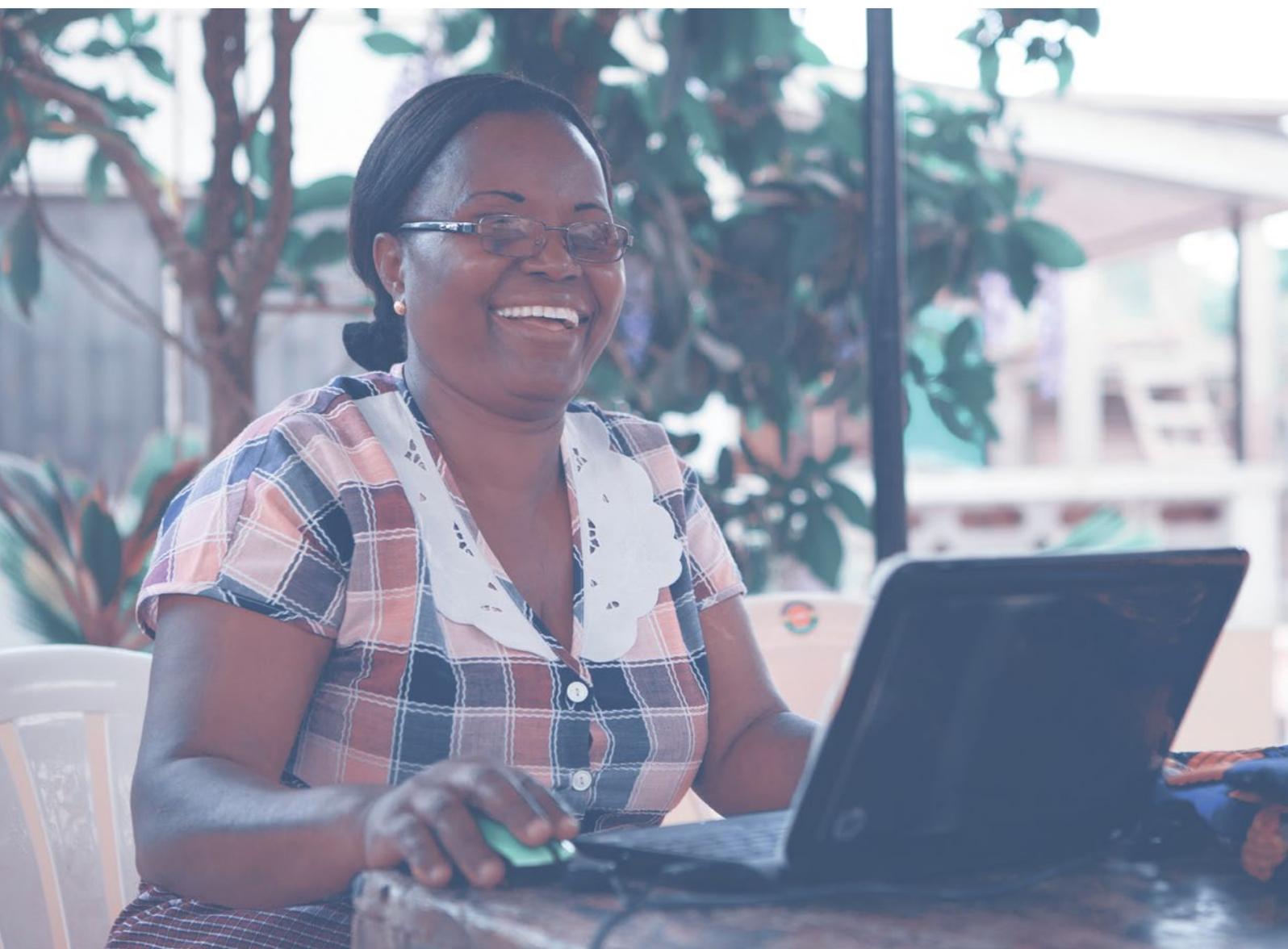
This could be new knowledge, experience of a particular business function – or you may provide training or capability building as part of the volunteer opportunity. Other less tangible benefits could include supporting people living with axSpA or being part of increasing awareness.

Some things to consider to give your volunteers a good experience:

- **Boundaries.** It is crucial for everyone within the organisation, including volunteers, to be aware of the limits and boundaries to their role. For example, if a volunteer receives an enquiry from a patient, you might want all enquiries to be dealt with by a member of staff and the volunteer should know who to pass that enquiry to. Similarly, you might want to be clear that only medical professionals should provide medical advice.
- **Engage them.** Involving volunteers in organisational meetings and events will allow them to connect more personally with your mission. Giving the opportunity to have real input will also make volunteers feel more valued, as well as the organisation gaining their insight.
- **Flexibility.** Build in as much flexibility as possible for volunteers – this can allow volunteers to help in ways that suit their lifestyle and other commitments. Don't forget they are giving their time for free.
- **Onboarding and training.** Ensure new volunteers are given a warm welcome, information about the organisation, a chance to meet staff, and are trained as needed.
- **Protect their wellbeing.** It is helpful to check regularly with volunteers that they feel comfortable and are happy in the work they are doing for the organisation. If you are asking them to carry out activities on your organisation's premises or in public, they should be covered by an adequate insurance policy in case of accident. The legal guidance about insurance will differ around the world and you should check local legislation.
- **References.** Some volunteers, particularly students, may be grateful for a reference or letter of recommendation that they can provide to future employees as evidence of real-world experience they gained while volunteering.

- **Role description.** Writing a description of the role that outlines what you expect from the volunteer and what they can expect from you can help to clarify responsibilities. It also helps the person clearly understand what they are committing to.
- **Support.** Ensuring there are people who can help volunteers if they need assistance is important. Volunteers should know who to contact and how to reach them if they need guidance. The more you support your volunteers, the more you will help them feel valued.

Take the time to thank and celebrate your volunteers. It is important to show how much you appreciate the time they give to the organisation and how valuable they are.





## Some final things to consider

- Some volunteers may be willing and have the time to become more involved and take on greater responsibility within your organisation
- Providing opportunities and training for volunteers to get more involved in your organisation can help support your capacity to meet your mission and will simultaneously turn their time with you into a fulfilling, educational and personal development experience
- What it is appropriate for a volunteer to have access to? Do you have any confidential information, such as medical or financial information? Consider asking volunteers to sign a non-disclosure agreement if necessary
- Investing in your volunteers will make them some of your greatest assets and allow your organisation to have a bigger impact
- Finally, volunteers are representing the organisation in much the same way as staff. It is therefore important to make sure that all volunteers understand the organisation's principles and values and that they fully support them.



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