



Engaging volunteers

By Louise Bennett, CEO, IDPE

Changing face of volunteering

In the recent IDPE and Marts & Lundy membership survey, half of the schools that responded saw a 50% increase in alumni volunteering, and according to the most recent UK Civil Society Almanac: *'Over half of the population volunteered their time informally to help others at least once during the pandemic.'* There is no doubt that there has been an upsurge in volunteering in response to COVID, but as we move forward post-pandemic, how can we capitalise on this outpouring of support, and empower more members of our school community to give of their time, not just their money?

Make it easy

In the *Respond, reset, recover* report produced by Nottingham Trent University and NCVO, which has been regularly surveying voluntary organisations during the pandemic, the number of volunteer roles that could be done remotely or online increased – for example, from the start of the pandemic in March 2020 to September 2020, 39% of respondents had seen an increase in volunteering remotely. All schools have made the shift to engaging with their communities virtually, but as we return to face-to-face events, it will be important to consider how your school will work with volunteers in new ways. Can you offer shorter, ad hoc, online or more informal volunteering opportunities to make it as easy as possible for your school community to volunteer?

Ensure added value

There is no point in having volunteers for volunteers' sake! The pandemic has offered us all an opportunity to take a step back and review what is – and isn't working – and to look at the role of your volunteers and how they make a difference. Whilst volunteers, quite rightly, need your support, any time spent engaging with your volunteers must advance your strategic aims – consider how much time you are investing in your volunteers and whether this is in proportion to their impact.

Make the ask

As fundraisers, we know one of the main reasons why people don't give, is because they were never asked. Volunteering is no different. Develop your volunteering opportunities to meet different interests and motivations, and then don't forget to ask your school community to get involved.

Don't forget your pupils

Not surprisingly, given the risk COVID-19 presents to older generations, volunteering among 55–64-year-olds dropped from 16% in November 2019, to 9% in May 2020, according to the NFP Synergy report *The big trend: Are young people replacing old people as the key volunteering group?* (August 2020). Yet volunteering rates amongst the under-30s dramatically increased, reflecting a wider trend among 16-24-year-olds that has seen volunteering rates increase from 30% to 40% since 2018.



Throughout the pandemic, there were countless examples of pupils volunteering their time to support their communities – but post-pandemic, how will you encourage your pupils to continue to give their time?

Check in regularly

Volunteers want to feel included in the goals of your school, and that their work (even though unpaid) is valued and appreciated. They are ‘on your side’ and bring energy, ideas and time to help you achieve your goals – so how will you capture feedback from them to help you shape your strategy moving forward?

Celebrate your volunteers

Volunteers come in all shapes and sizes, from the more structured role of governors and trustees, to the more informal roles of speakers for careers talks, ambassadors for giving days, or organisers for local reunions, but it is important to recognise the contribution of *all* your volunteers both to encourage your volunteers to continue to give their time, but also to encourage others to volunteer in the future. Share how your volunteers are making a difference using #IDPEGivingWeek.

Say thank you ... again and again

It goes without saying that we need to acknowledge the giving of time as well as giving financially, on an ongoing basis. That is why I want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you who has volunteered for IDPE. At the heart of the IDPE community are our members. From trustees, regional vice presidents and members of steering groups, to speakers, chairs and those who share thought pieces, case studies and other resources, IDPE relies on the incredible generosity of our volunteers to share their expertise and experience, to advance the schools’ development sector. Who will you thank during IDPE Giving Week?