

CAPACITY BUILDING ACROSS YOUR COMMUNITY



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In May, I was sitting in on a workshop that my colleague Manny Gatt, was facilitating for Derby City Council. In one of the exercises, the topic of *volunteers* came up. It was in the context of volunteers fulfilling roles that have formerly been carried out by paid public sector staff.

The debate was whether the public sector has fractured community cohesion and growth by sometimes removing the volunteering in a locality, that builds friendships and a sense of care for others.

Then the discussion turned to the perceived baggage that the word *volunteer* can carry. For example, *free labour, well meaning but ineffective, or transient commitment.*

So, based on the tools in our new *Collaborative Leadership Across Your Community* toolkit, I suggested they consider using the phrase *ChangeMaker* instead, as it is outcome focused and has less baggage.

Who are your ChangeMakers?

The name *ChangeMakers* came out of the RSA report on Peterborough Council's project to engage more residents in community activity.

The review of the project by the RSA identified that those who came forward to join the various projects were members of the clergy, artists, head teachers, social entrepreneurs, housing officers, charity workers, police officers, members of the local chamber of commerce, representatives from the local primary care trust, businessmen and everyday council officers.



All were found to be adept at driving positive change in their local areas and many possessed an *'impressive repertoire of capabilities, and are instilled with an appetite to apply their skills and experience to address local issues.'*¹

So, let's change the language and stop using the tarnished word *volunteer* and start using the outcome focused term *Changemaker*.

What do ChangeMakers want?

In his book *It's Cooperation Stupid*, Charles Leadbeater² puts forward the case that most people are not self-interested and like to help others.³

But he is also clear that people are more likely to cooperate when the conditions are right. Drawing on good practice across the study of volunteer (*ChangeMaker*) management and

¹ RSA (2012) *ChangeMaker Report*

² Leadbeater, C. (2012) *It's Cooperation Stupid*. London: ippr. A senior fellow at NESTA.

³ Richard Dawkin in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976) makes the case for this supposition. Adam Smith in his book *Wealth of Nations* makes the case for self-interest as a driver that should be harnessed to produce the public good of higher productivity and greater choice. These laissez-faire assumptions have driven policies based on market forces, competition and incentives.

ChangeMakers are the community volunteers, community activists and project delivery teams who step forward to work with you on your project.

A vicar I know tells the story of how his predecessor's only way of getting rid of a talentless volunteer organist, was to have the stairs to the organ loft condemned, on the grounds of health and safety.

other sources, he cites seven factors that will support community cooperation.

People are more likely to cooperate when:

- The activity is framed in a way that encourages cooperation
- There is a reliable framework of fairness, including effect sanctions for free-riders
- People are able to rely on norms of reciprocity and peer-to-peer learning to enforce sanctions, rather than material incentives and abstract rules, both of which tend to undermine cooperation
- There are lots of opportunities for communication, including face-to-face, to make cooperation feel personal and establish a sense of empathy and shared purpose
- It is easy for co-operators to find one another because they are acting out in the open
- The ChangeMakers can build up a valued reputation as people who can be trusted to do their fair share of the work
- People feel that others are part of the same group.

This is supported by the RSA, who state that people, given the space, the right circumstances and the necessary skills, would be *'far more willing to close their social aspiration gap; that gap between the kind of society we wish to live in and the one in which we find ourselves based on our current behaviours'*⁴.

There are tools in the *Collaborative Leadership Across Your Communities* toolkit, that will help you begin to plan the recruitment of your community ChangeMakers who will work on

⁴ RSA (2012) *ChangeMakers Report*

the projects and programmes you will be leading.

It helps you identify and create the environment in which your residents, citizens, students, patients, etc, are most likely to co-operate with you.

If you build it they will come!

Once you create the right conditions for co-operation, and have sent out some invites, your ChangeMakers should start turning up to ask about helping out. The problem can be that some turn up because of availability, rather than ability.

They will always be the right people. But they may be applying for the wrong volunteering role.

The recruitment, management and retention of ChangeMakers is a complex, professional science. The Universities of York, Derby, Birmingham and the OU all offer graduate, or postgraduate programmes, in volunteer management.

If you are to lead collaboratively across a community project it will require sustained engagement with ChangeMakers, and if you are new to this kind of work, there is plenty of help⁵.

But it is important to recognise that these volunteers are just that. You will have limited control over them. They do not have a contract with you and they can walk away at any time in the project. Also, some can stay beyond their sell-by date and that is an issue too.

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⁵ The National Centre For Volunteer Organisations is the central hub for learning and good practice in the UK. www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

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stairs to the organ loft condemned, on the grounds of health and safety. Failure to recruit and manage the appropriate volunteers from your community, can add to your workload and be a distraction from the project.

In research by the Cabinet Office in 2007⁶, volunteers confirmed they stepped forward for the following reasons:

- To make a difference and improve things
- To help people
- To meet people and make friends
- There was a need in the community
- To use their skills
- To learn new skills
- It is part of their religious belief
- To help get on in their career

Maybe you could reflect on your own experience of volunteering and the reasons that you stepped forward. It could inform your attitude, to the leadership experience you want to offer to the volunteers in your project.

Painting a picture of personal success

An important part of your leadership is offering a clear picture of what the volunteer can expect, and will personally gain, in return for their donation of time. Maybe also their donation of unclaimed expenses for travel and other activities. Volunteers should have a role description that profiles your requirements.

Volunteer England states clearly that the best practice in volunteer management demands that volunteers have 'role descriptions'. (Note it is not a *job description* as that implies a contract

of employment, and entitlement to employment rights.)

On the Volunteer England website⁷ there are many examples of the role descriptions used by major charities such as St John's Ambulance.

Drawing together the key elements from the role descriptions, here are the recurring themes they seek to resolve:

- What will we call their 'role' in the project?
- What do we hope they will bring to the project?
- What is in it for them?
- Therefore, what experience will they need to do that?
- What will their time commitment have to be to the project?
- Who will they be accountable to?
- How will they be managed?
- What induction will they require to fully understand their role?
- How will we thank them and sustain their interest?
- What training do they need to engage with the project?

There are a range of tools in the *Collaborative Leadership Across Your Communities* toolbox that will guide you in the development of appropriate ChangeMaker role descriptions for your project.

The primary outcome will be that you can recruit, develop and retain the most appropriate ChangeMakers for the most appropriate roles.

⁶ Cabinet Office UK (2007) *Helping Out*. The report has been archived so you may want to Google it to find a copy.

⁷ <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/component/gpb/creatingvolunteerroles>