

This topic note is one of a series for trustees and managers of community buildings.

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Recruiting Volunteers for Your Village Hall

The challenges of recruiting new volunteers, especially trustees, are often raised by community halls. Here are some tips for attracting and retaining trustees from all parts of the community:

- **Work out what skills you need** – is it someone to take on your social media and website, or someone to organise events, people who like to do DIY, or gardening, or those with financial skills. Knowing what skills you already have and where the gaps are will help work out the best ways of recruiting.
- **Ask your user groups to appoint trustees** – most village hall governing documents allow for this. Involving local community groups using the hall in decisions is a really good way of keeping in touch with their needs and the wider community. So if they're not appointing, encourage them to do so and get involved in the direction of the hall.
- **Spread the load** – much work at village halls can be done by volunteers and often people start by volunteering before becoming trustees. Examples are running community events, helping with fundraising, or joining a monthly garden maintenance group. Remember that if volunteers are regularly attending management committee meetings and taking part in decision making, they are in effect managing trustees and should be aware of this.
- **Trustee liability** – for most village halls, the risks of trustees being personally liable for debts or losses to the village hall charity are very low but the perception of risk often does not match this reality. It's a good exercise as a group of trustees to look at potential risk and what protection you have in place already, eg personal injury claims should be covered by your public liability insurance (and you must first be shown to have been negligent for the claim to be successful). Following good management and financial practices are the best way of reducing risk.
- **Reach out to the wider community** – it's very easy to appear to be a 'closed shop' and only recruit from a particular section of the community. Be proactive in approaching all sections of the community including younger members, disabled, long term residents as well as newcomers and explain why they are needed. Brief them on what the role involves and why others have volunteered. Reasons volunteers give for stepping up include:

- ❖ Giving something back to the village
- ❖ Enjoying being part of the focus of village life
- ❖ To save the village hall from threat of closure – they would feel guilty if it did close and they could have done something to stop it.
- ❖ Recognising that the village hall is a vital community space, encouraging community cohesion, local activities and services and reducing the necessity to use the car to travel outside the village.
- ❖ Meet other people and make friends – an essential and important part of the social fabric of the community
- ❖ To help improve and maintain the facilities for an activity they enjoy.

Some ideas to try

- Local advertising through social media, an advert or article in the parish magazine, posters in the village is a useful warm up before approaching individuals
- Community events – open days, community consultation events, fish and chip supper, the Annual Parish Meeting and any other opportunity to meet and talk to people about the hall.
- Make the AGM a social occasion, eg with nibble and drinks, having a speaker, good advertising or combining it with another event. Make sure the AGM is well run: financial report available to all, questions can be asked, nominations for elected trustees properly invited, and votes taken as needed.
- Planning a major refurbishment or opening a new or refurbished hall are often good opportunities to have a recruitment drive.

Widen your net

Try advertising your vacancies with your local infrastructure organisation (also called CVSs) or with one of the specialist volunteer bureaus. You never know who you might find and elected trustees do not usually need to come from the community – but check your governing document to make sure of this.

Retaining volunteers:

- **THANK your volunteers** often and publically! Many people do not know that village halls are run by volunteers and do not appreciate the time and effort that is required, so tell people about it.

- **Be a success.** Make people feel that they are involved in something successful, responsive to the needs of the community, with exciting ideas and plans for the future.
- **Make it fun.** Arrange social events to bring the committee together
- **Organise committee meetings well:** have a clear agenda (not too long!), keep to time, involve everyone in discussions, consider a refreshment break.

If you'd like to know more about the AirS community buildings service, please contact villagehalls@ruralsussex.org.uk

AJM
November 2025