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# Volunteer programme best practice

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London Olympics 2012

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Excerpts from paper on The Games Makers Programme

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*“Volunteering may not pay in cash, but it pays in emotion, passion and drive.”*

Emily Yates, one of London 2012's *Games Makers*

What does it take to mobilise, engage and create a rewarding experience for volunteers? Here are some lessons from the *Games Maker Programme* that saw the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics supported by over 70,000 volunteers. We have put together the excerpts from an article written by Jean Tomlin, Director of HR, Accreditation and Workforce, LOCOG.

(For complete article, please click on: <http://bit.ly/1f7hndY> )

LOCOG had an overall volunteering vision – they needed **brilliant volunteers** to help deliver a great Games. The volunteering programme was a binary challenge – it either worked or failed, there was no middle ground.

## 1. One Team

The Games had a 200,000 strong workforce made up of paid staff, volunteers and contractors that focused on creating ‘one team’ that had:

- the right workforce;
- in the right roles;
- in the right place; and
- at the right time.



## 2. Volunteers add value

Everyone believed volunteers would make the difference between a good and great Games. This was based on the experience of previous Games. It was vital that all staff understood volunteering to guarantee volunteers were treated equally. A group of Trailblazer volunteers were recruited as part of the head office team from the outset to help educate paid members of staff in how to work alongside volunteers.

There was similar support and training for volunteers and paid staff although their individual journeys were different. Central HR team managed recruitment and general induction but functional managers expected to select, do role-specific training and ongoing management. This meant they had ownership of the volunteers they selected from the outset.

## 3. Leadership

Essential not to underestimate the role of the CEO and the Chair in leading by example, whether by supporting recruitment, being at induction events, communicating regularly with volunteers or simply being visible.

Directors were responsible for the volunteers in their workforce not the HR team. The HR team created the processes, standards, approach etc. but Directors and their teams were expected to spend time with their volunteers from the outset to set the culture and provide support.

Leaders were expected to embody the values of empathy and respect – this was also expected of everyone in the ‘One Team’, as they would ultimately have to apply the same approach when dealing with the public and each other in the lead up to and during the Games. Disrespect of volunteers was not something that would be tolerated.

## 4. Infrastructure and investment to support big numbers

Research suggested 1.2m people might apply to volunteers. Time was spent on design of the website to facilitate clear messaging, an effective welcome, efficient application handling, and to set realistic expectations to filter out those not willing to make the necessary commitments.

This worked in that only 241,000 actually applied (the largest ever voluntary response in an Olympic and Paralympic Games). The IT system did an initial sift aligning preferences expressed by applicants with those stated by the functional areas who would ultimately host



them. 89,000 invited to selection meetings. 70,000 were invited to training and became volunteers for circa 600 different roles.

One of the areas identified from previous experience as requiring focus and attention was the time that needed to be allocated by functional areas to support and take joint ownership for the sifting and management of volunteers who had expressed preferences in their area. HR and the Games workforce planning team provided each functional area with a detailed schedule setting out the timetable and resources they would need in order to successfully recruit and train such large numbers of volunteers. For some of the larger demand areas such as event services where circa 13000 volunteers were required, this meant having in the order of 5FTEs focused on volunteer recruitment and training. It was up to each Functional Director to make sure they had enough paid staff on hand to do the necessary administration to select, role-train and on-board their volunteers in accordance with an overall framework. Standards had to be maintained throughout with the same experience even though individuals would be carrying out different tasks.

## 5. Volunteer motivation recognised

It was very important that volunteers allowed their personalities to shine through their volunteering so that a superb customer service was delivered. Leaders and Managers had to have the courage to let volunteers operate within their roles as they saw best.

A lot of time was spent on uniform design so that it was both functional but importantly also gave out messages that volunteers were important. It had to be comfortable and colourful as many volunteers would be interacting with the public and would be carrying out way-finding duties. It had to reflect diversity and inclusion the UK wanted to showcase, be stylish, and have status and authority.

Volunteers' birthdays were celebrated and there were regular prize draws, recognition items such as badges reflecting the number of shifts worked, certificates, letters etc. Staff were also trained in how to manage their volunteers and how to release volunteers in a dignified and comfortable way at the end of the Games.

'I DO ACT' mnemonic was used for all Games Makers

- ✦ Inspirational
- ✦ Distinctive
- ✦ Open
- ✦ Alert



- Consistent
- Team

The aim was for everyone to feel engaged so they had an unbreakable connection to the Games to inspire passion and support.

## 6. Setting the right expectations

Understood that needed to set volunteer expectations from the start – for example the time commitment and unglamorous nature of some roles. “*Have you got what it takes to be a Games Maker*” Marketing for recruitment aimed at setting expectations from outset, but local volunteer ambassadors were a key tool for recruiting effective volunteers. HR and Nations and Regions staff were responsible for making sure local ambassadors were well looked after, and they therefore became great advocates.

## 7. Effective risk management

The metrics tell you what is working and what isn't. There were clear targets and monitoring of the metrics on a daily/ weekly basis with directors were accountable for meeting their targets.

Bottlenecks in workforce provision were identified and managed. Behind each line of metrics was an identified contingency.

## 8. Integrated approach to diversity

Not only was it the first time that the Olympic and Paralympic Games were planned as one rather than two separate events, but a truly integrated approach was taken to diversity for the whole workforce. Contractors were advised at the procurement stage what diversity targets they would be expected to meet. Each Director was responsible for a particular aspect of diversity and willingly worked alongside the workforce managers to ensure target zones were met. Contractors were asked to report on behaviours as well as numbers.

## 9. It had its own brand

The ‘Games Makers’ brand reflected the importance given to volunteers from the start with time spent on developing a distinct offer including what the uniforms would look like. The brand became so successful that all staff eventually became seen as ‘Games Makers’ as everyone not just the volunteers would contribute to the Games being a success.



## 10. Communication

The central HR team had to repeat their messages and information regularly, because the workforce grew so rapidly with new people arriving all the time. Essentially everyone understood the ethos they working to.

### Keys to Success

- Ⓜ Attention to detail
- Ⓜ Brilliant recruitment and selection
- Ⓜ Brilliant induction and training
- Ⓜ Brilliant communications and engagement
- Ⓜ Allow people to bring their true personalities to the role
- Ⓜ Allow leaders to role model and lead - leaders need to be the change they need to see happen

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For more information:

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