WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS

Community Broadband Scotland

WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS

INTRODUCTION

Community Broadband Scotland (CBS) works to empower communities across Scotland and help them to address the connectivity issues in their area. CBS only works with communities who will not benefit from any broadband services supplied by a commercial provider, often because it would not be possible for a commercial provider to deliver the service profitably.

Grant funding from CBS and volunteer input is vital to all community broadband projects. Without them, it would not be possible to get many of these projects off the ground. Volunteering in particular is crucial for communities who have decided to build the network themselves.

Volunteering for a community broadband project brings many benefits to the community. For the group, it keeps costs down, removing the need to employ paid staff to complete the project. For the volunteers, it builds their own skills and experience, which will not only benefit them personally within their own professional lives but also, helps them to feel a sense of ownership over the project.

Additionally, this experience can be transferred to other initiatives, for example, community renewable energy projects or other developments. For large CBS-funded projects, a degree of collaboration will be essential between previously-disparate communities. This networking will create a foundation for future collaboration.

Given how important volunteers are to the success of your CBS-funded project, it is important to consider how to get the most out of them. It is likely that some members of your community will meaningfully be able to contribute to the project. However, you should consider the implications of utilising a volunteer base and how to manage them accordingly.

WHAT SKILLS HAVE YOU GOT?

When you decide to undertake a community broadband project, it is likely that there may already be members of the community who will have some of the skills necessary to take the

project forward. There are a number of different ways you and your group can establish what skills and expertise is available. These can include:

1. The feedback from your community survey. (We've included an example of a skills checklist that you can use to help you take stock of the skills available)

2. Scoping out who is currently engaged on boards in your area e.g. community council, development trusts etc.

3. Contacting people who are or have been engaged in volunteering for local development projects before – if they have done so before, they are much more likely to volunteer again

4. Spending some time with your committee and making a list of these names as well as identifying who is going to approach them is also worth considering

It is useful to compare the list of skills you currently have in your community with those of which you lack so you can work towards addressing the skills gap. It's worth bearing in mind that the skills required to scope, develop and build a CBS project may be different from those required to operate it.

ADDRESSING THE SKILLS GAP

Once you have identified a skill that you lack in your committee, there are several ways you can address it:

1. Ask around your community to see if anyone knows someone with a particular skill and contact them

2. Work with your CBS adviser to establish if there are suitable training courses available to up-skill existing members of the committee

3. If possible, your CBS adviser may also be able to identify external sources of help e.g. paid consultants

HOW DO YOU MANAGE YOUR VOLUNTEER BASE?.

As with any group task that needs to be completed, people work best when they are clear about what they have to do and what is expected from them. Volunteering is no different. Therefore it's important to make sure each volunteer knows what role they are playing in the project and where their role begins and ends.

Do:

- Keep your volunteers engaged
- Be Flexible
- Train your Volunteers (if required)
- Be very clear on your expectations (time, role etc.)
- Try to cover out of pocket expenses (if there is funding available to do so)
- Use their network/contacts to find other sources of help e.g. more volunteers
- Try to find new volunteers to bring new skills and expertise into your committee

Don't:

- Allow volunteers to get complacent
- Overwork or overstretch them
- Use contractual language (e.g. reasonable expectations not absolute requirements)

A timetable with tasks should be agreed with each individual volunteer, detailing their required input and an end date. It's good to remember that your volunteers may already be committed to other projects in your area and have family or business commitments. It's important therefore to be realistic at the outset about the amount of time a volunteer can contribute to a project.

HOW DO YOU CAPTURE THE VALUE OF YOUR VOLUNTEER INPUT?

The contribution that volunteers make has a real quantifiable value both in terms of time, money and expertise. If volunteers were not available to take forward a project, paid resources would be necessary (although not feasible in most cases). Like any resource available to an organisation, a pool of experienced and capable volunteers represents an asset.

If you wish, your CBS adviser can assist you to measure this input through your business plan and project monitoring.

SKILLS CHECKLIST

In an ideal world, these are the skills and experience you would seek within your community to deliver a CBS-funded project. It should be noted that one person may possess several of these skills. It's unlikely you will find all of these within your community but nonetheless it is helpful to identify where you may have skills gaps.

- ❑ **IT/Telecoms**
- ❑ **Legal**
- ❑ **Financial or Accountancy**
- ❑ **PR/Communications**
- ❑ **Project Management**
- ❑ **Procurement**
- ❑ **Good Governance/Board Leadership**
- ❑ **Administration/Record Keeping**
- ❑ **Good connections with local movers and shakers**
- ❑ **Public Funding Management**