

Safeguarding Giving: the Volunteer and the Intern

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Abstract: Levels of volunteering have risen dramatically within the last four years in Ireland. Unemployment in August 2012 was at 14.8%, and 50% of those volunteering are doing so to improve their job prospects. This study examines the growing prevalence and status of volunteers and interns in the Irish non-profit cultural sector. The role that organisational policy may play in the relationship between volunteer and host organisation within the context of the current economic climate is also investigated. The paper concludes that developing a volunteer policy can enable cultural organisations to ethically harness the valuable resource volunteers provide. Further, such policy development is an important stage in the volunteer management cycle for achieving best practice and avoiding job substitution.

Keywords: Volunteer policy; internship; philanthropy; volunteer management; unemployment

There is without a doubt a growing concern that interns may be taken advantage of, that the educative nature of an internship is being ignored and that the cultural industry may become overly dependent on free labour.

Introduction

Private giving has become an increasingly popular panacea within the cultural sector in Ireland, especially within an environment of reduced public funding, unstable self-generated revenue streams, high unemployment and increased competition between arts organisations for vital resources. Giving can take many forms, both financial and in-kind, from donations of funds to mentoring, resource sharing to voluntary labour. A narrowing between the American 'facilitator' model of funding and the Irish 'patron' model (Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey, 1989, p. 1) through the development of private giving has been mooted on many occasions in recent years, but it remains to be seen whether Ireland could or should adopt this more corporate vision of arts funding (Wright, 2001, p. 6). What this research puts forward is that developing a wider range of funding models could be encouraged through the broadening of our preconceived definition of private giving.

This essay will examine voluntary labour (volunteer/intern), and how a change in the nature of its use could help both to reduce financial uncertainties and capitalise on a wide range of opportunities which it presents. In a time of particularly high unemployment, the changing nature of the volunteer workforce will be examined, as well as how this resource can be developed within the cultural sector for both the volunteer and the organisation through policy creation. It will also investigate the common perception that there is a growing demand for and dependence on voluntary labour within cultural organisations.

Recent research into volunteering trends has revealed a 100% increase in volunteering numbers over the 2008/2009 period (Curran, 2009, p. 2) and there is no sign that this is abating. With over 34,000 people registering to volunteer in the 2010-2012 period at volunteer centres alone, 11% of registrants volunteering to improve skills (Volunteering Ireland, 2012) and an unemployment rate of 14.8% in August 2012, investigating how the cultural sector can harness this opportunity while safeguarding the volunteer is vital.

Volunteer and intern: clarifying terms

To begin, there are numerous difficulties associated with defining voluntary work, mainly because of the variety of non-profit organisations and volunteer roles. A voluntary act is a gift and

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is therefore a significant form of private giving:

Volunteering is work without pay; the branch of philanthropy in which time replaces cheque book... The word "volunteer" is a victim of the slippery English language, its meaning changing over time at ever-increasing speed... (Gunyon, 2004).

The difficulties of definition become even more apparent when attempting to distinguish between volunteers and interns, because while both are forms of voluntary labour, a volunteer can have a philanthropic interest at heart (fulfilling a social function), whereas an intern often has a more personal and self-motivated interest (fulfilling a knowledge or instrumental function) (Ruddle, 1993). Motivations, therefore, vary widely and the boundaries between unpaid volunteers and unpaid interns have become increasingly blurred in recent years.

According to *Volunteering Ireland*¹ (Williams, 2010) the distinction between the two is best explained in terms of added value: volunteers add value and capacity rather than filling a vital role; interns may not have the skills to carry out the job effectively (but have the potential) and so require training. The Oxford Dictionary (2012) similarly defines an intern as 'a student or trainee who does a job, sometimes without pay, in order to gain work experience or satisfy requirements for a qualification.' However other recent research concerning volunteers and interns adopt varying definitions: the Arts Council England defines an intern as: '...short term... should be either their first experience of a particular sector or role, or the "next step"... the intern is expected to contribute to the work of the organisation' (2011). Voluntary Arts and Volunteering England have defined volunteerism as: 'any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone... other than, or in addition to, close relatives' (2012).

The significant difference here relates to the educative nature of an internship, but both roles are voluntary. Essentially, although distinctions between them have been drawn in different ways, volunteering and internships are both unpaid donations of time, skill and effort. For the purposes of this article, the term 'volunteers' will refer to both interns and volunteers, unless otherwise specified, as the issues facing both groups share many similarities.

The situation, status and regulation of volunteers in Ireland

The volunteer infrastructure within Ireland has developed quite considerably in the last decade especially since the establishment of the National Committee on Volunteering in 2000, which examined and made recommendations on three important issues:

(1) The possibilities for recognition and accreditation of voluntary work and for training undertaken as a volunteer, (2) measures to widen the pool of volunteers and (3) the range of supports needed to promote, sustain and develop volunteering. (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002, p. II)

In addition to a phenomenal increase in volunteering numbers, there has been a growing emphasis on the status, regulation and development of voluntary activity in Ireland through such initiatives as the establishment of the national volunteer development agency, *Volunteering Ireland* (now *Volunteer Ireland*) (2001); *Volunteering Ireland's* national awards, the *Ireland InVOLved Awards* (2001); the governmental advice group, the *Taskforce on Active Citizenship* (2007); and the university volunteer programme *ROVE* (*Recognition of Voluntary Engagement*) in *University College Dublin* and *National University of Ireland, Galway* (2008).

In 2004, The Joint Committee on Arts, Sports, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs produced a number of recommendations which were designed to 'raise public awareness of volunteering (and) facilitate new ways of participating in voluntary work' (DeI Cid and Hurley, 2005, p. 9). Despite these initiatives, there is no central government policy on volunteering,² and⁷ the volunteering support and development infrastructure is well below European

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levels, both in terms of a lack of information technology for local support centres and a lack of funds for volunteer management (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002, p. VI).

Despite research suggesting that the current economic situation will lead to a decline in volunteering (Anheier, 2009, p. 4), recent statistics indicate otherwise: CSO figures³ report that between 17% and 33% of the adult population regularly volunteers (Volunteering Ireland 2010a). A 2009 report by the Volunteer Development Agency of Northern Ireland on *Volunteering and the Recession* notes that 50% of organisations have registered an increase in volunteering numbers. This rising figure is thought to be due to a number of factors: recent initiatives to promote volunteering, an increase in awareness of social concerns, a growth in the number of voluntary organisations (GHK, 2010, p. 8), and people wanting to increase their employability (Volunteer Development Agency, 2009). This emphasis on improving one's employability is backed up by McKenna⁴ (2009, p., 12) and also by Garvey, CEO of The Wheel (Ireland's support and representative umbrella network for community, voluntary and charitable organisations), who states that a record number of unemployed people are engaging in volunteering 'as a means of maintaining their skills and making a meaningful commitment to their communities' (Garvey, 2009, p. 2).

It has also become evident that both the number of people applying for internships and the length of internships on offer has increased phenomenally, despite the lack of financial remuneration (Theatre Forum Ireland, 2009, p. 50). The newest development in this area is JobBridge, the National Internship Scheme (National Employment and Entitlements Service, 2012). By September 2012, over 10,000 people had commenced an internship through this Scheme since it was launched in July 2011. The greatest proportion of the placements (46%) are carried out by those between the ages of 25 and 34, and 67% are with private companies. However JobBridge has not been without its critics, particularly with respect to the lengthy duration of its placements, the replacing of paid jobs with intern positions, and questions over their vetting and appropriateness. As Una Mullally has pointed out in a series of recent *Irish Times* articles, the scheme has the potential to develop into an institutionalisation of internships, formally supported and implemented by government bodies:

In Ireland the extension of internships from traditionally desirable workplaces, and industries perceived as hard to access, to those perceived to be less desirable was made official by JobBridge. By creating a Government scheme within what had been an unregulated market – dominated by casual internship schemes, university work placements and more official Fortune 500 company training programmes – State-sponsored internships are now available in many sectors. (Mullally, 2013)

Due to the fact that the average volunteer is now more highly skilled and experienced than before, volunteers have higher aspirations and expectations and organisations are demanding higher qualifications for volunteer positions (GHK, 2010). This presents a situation which potentially benefits the employer over the volunteer: the organisation has better qualified applicants to choose from, whilst competition amongst volunteers is higher than ever before. This is especially true for internships (Greenhouse, 2010).

The *Volunteering and the Recession* report (2009) found the length of time volunteers are willing to give has increased considerably, a change the authors concluded can be put down to the increase in unemployment: volunteers/interns wish to use their time productively when out of work, gain new skills and contacts, and enjoy themselves without expense. This is both an opportunity and a risk: an opportunity for both the organisation and the volunteer in terms of skills, experience and knowledge that can be transferred, and a risk, as volunteering is not regulated.

One of the greatest risks is the legal status of interns, and this is an area where limited research currently exists. According to a recent *New York Times* article (Greenhouse, 2010), US

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labour laws are becoming stricter about the legal criteria for employers taking on interns. The US Department of Labor (2010) currently defines an internship as:

...similar to training which would be given in an educational environment... is for the benefit of the intern (and)... does not displace regular employees... The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern... The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages...

Much debate centres on how viable this definition really is, especially seeing as it is unlikely that an organisation would take on an intern if there was no 'advantage' to doing so. There is a growing concern that internships are getting out of control, that 'the internship has become about taking advantage of free labour rather than a mutually beneficial exchange of work and training for employers and students' (San Francisco Chronicle, 2010). Advocacy groups such as Intern Aware (UK) currently lobby for application of minimum wage legislation to all classes of interns, and a 'global summit' of intern advocacy groups held in January 2013 suggests these concerns (and litigation connected to them) are becoming widespread (Bacalso, 2013).

A significant step has been made by Arts Council England who released guidelines in 2011 on engaging interns within arts organisations. Legal obligations of employers are outlined, as well as definitions of interns, 'workers' and how the existence of a 'contract,' either written or oral, can in some cases entitle interns to the minimum wage as 'workers' (Arts Council England, 2011). It remains to be seen how arts organisations in the UK adopt these guidelines, but a new £15 million Creative Employment Programme (launched in September 2012) to provide fairer routes into the arts through funding paid apprenticeships and internships will hopefully, in the long term, encourage companies to follow best practice. As Andrea Stark, Executive Director of Arts Council England states (Arts Council England, 2012):

If young people cannot gain entry into the sector workforce we risk losing a generation of talent, which would potentially have an adverse impact on the art that is produced, distributed and attended by the wider audience.

In Ireland no laws relate specifically to the legal protection of interns or volunteers. One important protection is the Duty of Care as set out by Volunteering Ireland (Volunteering Ireland, 2010c), which states that all organisations are legally bound to do everything possible to protect those with whom they come into contact with (staff, volunteers, customers etc). The purchase of insurance for volunteers on-the-job is believed to be common practice (Del Cid and Hurley, 2005, p. 5).

Despite legal shortcomings, a recent pan-European study on volunteering grouped Ireland with those countries (e.g. France, the UK) that lack a legal framework for volunteers but where regulation is implicit in other laws (GHK, 2010, p. 10). However 'implicit regulation' is not legal protection and we have much to learn from other countries, especially the UK.

Volunteers, interns and the cultural sector work force in Ireland

From a management perspective, there is limited literature on the nature of the workforce in the cultural sector in Ireland (or internationally), and on how the volunteer and intern fit into this structure.⁵ Fitzgibbon and Kelly (1997, p. 345) describe the overall employment structure in the cultural sector in Ireland as follows:

...a relatively small proportion of core, full-time permanent positions... a significant use of non-standard work (contract/temporary) and part-time work and a heavy reliance on government employment schemes and volunteers.

According to Fitzgibbon and Kelly, this model, characterised by 'increasing numbers of peripheral workers combined with a small, stable core of workers,' has resulted in a situation where almost 50% of arts managers experience periods of unemployment and high job movement

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and instability (p. 345). Little seems to have changed in the intervening years, and research suggests that the trend for engaging interns is increasing (Theatre Forum Ireland, 2009) and voluntary labour continues to make up a significant proportion of the workforce.

The Centre for Non-profit Management in Trinity College Dublin has been a forerunner in research on the voluntary sector in Ireland. Their 2008 report entitled *A Profile of Volunteer-Involving Organisations* is the most recent analysis of volunteering in Ireland. It states that the cultural sector accounts for 10% of volunteer-involving organisations (Prizeman and Donovan, 2008, p. 3) and is one of the five largest subsectors in the Irish non-profit sector (Donoghue et al., 2006, p. 9). One notable addition to research on volunteering in Ireland is the work by Bussell and Forbes (2005) which highlights the importance of 'intangible benefits' for volunteers within artistic institutions e.g. emotional ties, cultural awareness etc. In addition, the majority of respondents (35%) in a 2004 Association of Irish Festival Events report gave 'love of content' as their main reason for volunteering (Fiona Goh Consulting, 2004, p. 22). Volunteers are also believed to be more important in the cultural sector in terms of their 'input as "in-kind" employees' than in other sectors (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002, p. 7). Many arts organisations, especially festivals and much of the voluntary arts sector could not operate without volunteers and many cultural organisations (as charities) use voluntary boards.

Levels of volunteering in the non-profit sector have fluctuated over the last decade, and due to the absence of consistent research, it is difficult to ascertain the actual level of volunteering in Ireland. Further research is needed. What is without doubt however is a dramatic increase since 2008. This increase can be seen as a positive development, leading to increased involvement by the community in the arts, increased resources available to organisations with declining funds and the opening up of the area of volunteering to people who wish to use their free time and professional skill sets for a good cause, whether this is personal gain or to help society. As voluntary activities contribute to the stock of capital in a society (Armstrong and Baron, 2002), this increase can be seen as a positive marker for Irish civic society.

Another social benefit of volunteering is explained by NIACE, the UK's National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, which recognises the 'contribution that voluntary work can make to reskilling the workforce' as a route for 'unwaged adults wishing to use voluntary work as a stepping stone into paid employment' (NIACE, 1990, p. 10). Benefits include empowerment, skills and personal development, as well as recognising the existing skills, experience and competences of the volunteers (NIACE, 1990, p. 7). Problems include a lack of standards and a failure to recognise existing skills (NIACE, 1990, p. 12). The JobBridge Scheme states similar aims for its placements but at the time of writing it remains to be seen how this Scheme will affect the healthy development of the labour market.

Despite the fact that volunteering can be hugely beneficial to society, the management of the increase in volunteering numbers is vitally important as both arts professionals and volunteers are at risk should job substitution become a reality: those who are employed fear substitution by an unpaid worker, and those who are interns fear a continuation of interning without the prospect of a paid position. Bowgett claims that there are many who would argue that job substitution is a viable solution: 'a pragmatic solution to a loss of funding' (Bowgett, 2009) but this would spell disaster for the reputation and future of volunteering, and for arts roles as viable careers. The reality is that the replacement and displacement of paid jobs by interns does happen, and although unethical, is hard to prove illegal.

It is clear that despite the potentially diverse motivations behind offering, or recruiting voluntary labour, and despite the risk of job substitution, the outcome of such activity is generally

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beneficial to both the organisation and the individual. These same complex, diverse motivations can add to the confusion over the language used to describe those involved (volunteers, voluntary workers and interns) or the language used to talk about them (not 'use' but involve, empower, etc.).

Garvey (2009, p. 2) believes that volunteering will be essential to Ireland's economic recovery for a number of reasons:

Because it empowers individuals... breaks cycles of dependency... (and) reduces the social impact of recession... We have an opportunity to harness the energy, enthusiasm and skills of the growing army of volunteers...

Garvey may overestimate the power of volunteering but her article does reveal how important a resource volunteering can be both for non-profit organisations struggling with a sudden and unexpected drop in public and private funding, and for social capital formation. What remains to be seen however, is the actual extent of policy development on the ground and if this could help to 'achieve an enduring bond between the organisation and the volunteer, moving the potential volunteer up the ladder of loyalty to becoming an advocate of the organisation' (Bussell and Forbes, 2005, p. 2).

Best practice would indicate that the learning element of volunteering assists in the creation of 'an enduring bond between the organisation and the volunteer' (Bussell and Forbes, 2005, p. 2): the more time invested in candidates by the organisation, the better the rewards that can be reaped: benefits such as loyalty, returning (better trained) volunteers and an enhanced reputation. Unfortunately, recent Volunteering Ireland figures suggest that almost 80% of volunteers are given no training in their roles (Volunteering Ireland, 2010a). When present, induction processes for volunteers or on-the-job learning for interns can benefit the volunteer-organisation relationship. The extent to which volunteering can contribute to the employability of the worker varies hugely, but it is clear that the more formalised and educational the volunteering, the more productive it is for the volunteer's long term job prospects, and it should be undertaken with this goal in mind.

Discovering each volunteer's motivation, as well as the motivation of the individual host, is essential to proper management. Since volunteers are unpaid, their emotional engagement and satisfaction with the organisation are the most important elements for influencing the retention rates of both current and future volunteers and, if respected, voluntary labour has the potential to become a renewable and sustainable resource (Brudney and Meijs, 2009, p. 576). Especially in the cultural sector, volunteers are also a significant customer base (Bussell and Forbes, 2005, p. 2) and, as such, should be considered like any other stakeholder (Anheier, 2009, p. 5).

It is important to note that many of these new volunteers are vastly overqualified for the basic roles given. However, if they were given more responsible roles (and therefore risk job substitution), they would require increased supervision, necessitating an investment of additional time and resources on the organisation's part. Therefore the organisation is in a very tricky situation. If an organisation comes to see that it cannot carry out its mission without considerable volunteer input, then Volunteering Ireland (Williams, 2010) believes that it may be advisable to rethink one's mission and down-size, and not place undue pressure or responsibilities on volunteers. Revising an organisation's mission is not an easy task. Key challenges include clearly articulating the mission and having the time and resources to undertake the process. To avoid exploiting free labour however, it is essential.

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Volunteer management and policy creation

Voluntary labour, like all non-cash resources, is not a free resource. It comes with a certain level of costs, both monetary and managerial, but these are minimal in relation to the return which volunteers give through their gifts of time, experience, expertise, and even money (Eisner et al., 2009, p. 32). Volunteers and interns are an enormous and regularly undervalued resource: in 2004, volunteers clocked up over 185 Full Time Equivalent positions in Ireland in the festivals sector alone (Fiona Goh Consulting, 2004, p. 17), and numbers have increased since then with volunteers nationally contributing at least €9.3 million to the economy in 2011 (Volunteering Ireland, 2012).

Volunteer management theory is based primarily around the volunteer management cycle: developing policies and procedures; recruitment; screening/selection; training; support and supervision; motivation and recognition; monitoring and evaluation (Volunteer Benevoles Canada, 2010). It states that policy development is necessary in the planning stage to ensure all other stages of the cycle run smoothly. This has a number of benefits: it helps the organisation to think strategically and act professionally; it ensures continuity over time; it encourages more compliance and it lessens the chance of misinterpretation (Volunteering Ireland, 2010b).

The volunteer development agencies in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have developed policies and procedures for organisations, covering the involvement and recruitment of volunteers, as well as training for volunteer managers (Volunteer Centres Ireland, 2010). The Professional Association of Volunteer Managers of Ireland (PAVMI), Volunteering Ireland and Volunteer Now (Northern Ireland) run policy development and managerial courses for volunteer managers, and several databases exist for prospective volunteers. Most of the literature on volunteering and the formation of volunteer policies relates to non-profit social and health organisations. However, this literature is highly applicable to the cultural sector and provides a professional and transparent resource. Documents such as *Developing a Volunteer Policy for your Organisation* (Volunteer Centres Ireland, 2010), are clear, concise and relevant to the whole non-profit sector.

Although there are critics who would resist the professionalisation of volunteer management, fearing the over-regulation of a volunteer sector largely based on goodwill (GHK, 2010, p. 12), in the absence of explicit legal protection for volunteers, policies provide a basic employment agreement that sets out the responsibilities of each party. This is particularly relevant to the current economic climate where there is a growing need for cultural organisations to become more transparent and accountable.⁶

From the research, best practice encompasses:

- following the volunteer management cycle, especially planning and policy development, training/induction, supervision and feedback/exit interviews. All this must be tailored to suit the organisation.
- being aware and respectful of volunteer's motivations, skills and gift of time.
- having insurance in place and paying expenses.
- policies should be expanded in the case of interns to include the provision of job descriptions and formal training.

On the volunteer's side it is important to be aware of:

- why and how the organisation involves volunteers.

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- their own motivations and expectations.

Despite improvements in volunteer management procedures, job substitution will happen: in a situation where the funds are not there to do a job, but a volunteer is willing to do it unpaid, a policy can hinder but not impede this substitution. The JobBridge Scheme is a perfect example of this, with private companies rather than public or voluntary organisations being the main employer in the Scheme, and a number of these companies have recently been disqualified from the scheme for 'not adhering to compliance requirements and filling an existing job vacancy with an internship post' (Kennedy, 2013).

From the volunteer's point of view, policy is important in so far as it supports the proper management of volunteers. Respect, appreciation and clarity of intent are essential and the statement of this in a policy increases the likelihood of effective implementation.

Conclusions: danger or opportunity?

A recessionary environment demands rigorous attention to limited resources and an increase in the numbers of volunteers could present an important opportunity for non-profit cultural organisations. It is clear that for volunteers to add value to an organisation they need to be properly managed. Developing a volunteer policy which sets the boundaries and expectations for a mutually beneficial experience and which states clearly the aims and responsibilities of both organisation and volunteer, can make it easier to capitalise on the opportunities presented for all involved. However, if an organisation comes to see that it cannot carry out its mission without considerable volunteer input, then its mission needs to be revised.

There is without a doubt a growing concern that interns may be taken advantage of, that the educative nature of an internship is being ignored and that the cultural industry may become overly dependent on free labour. Should this situation be realised, it could 'stop making a career in the (cultural/voluntary) sector a viable choice, which will inevitably lead to a much less vibrant, sustainable sector' (Bowgett, 2009). Legally, there is little one can do to prevent a situation of job substitution by interns, or an over-reliance by organisations on volunteers. We can however, develop and implement volunteer policies to safeguard this fragile form of public giving.

As government-led initiatives aimed at decreasing unemployment and providing entry-level opportunities, Arts Council England's Creative Employment Programme and the JobBridge Scheme are vastly different approaches. Furthermore, Arts Council England's guidelines which state that interns are generally 'workers' and as such, under UK law, are entitled to the national minimum wage is a huge step forward for the cultural sector, and one which the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon should take note of, invest time and thought in, and guarantee that a generation of talent within the arts is not lost.

Above all, voluntary labour is a significant resource that needs to be harnessed ethically and efficiently, for both the organisation and society. This is undoubtedly a positive but challenging opportunity for the cultural sector. Inspiring motivation and loyalty in today's volunteers through professionalism and policy development will help guarantee a healthy sector in the years to come.

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NOTES

1. Volunteering Ireland and Volunteer Centres Ireland joined forces in 2012 and are now known as Volunteer Ireland. Volunteer Ireland, whose goal is also to inspire, promote and celebrate voluntary activity, is an essential resource for any volunteer-involving organisation. It provides essential training and literature for volunteer managers on management issues and policy development. See www.volunteer.ie.
2. The Green Party has developed a volunteer policy which includes a definition of volunteering and the key challenges faced by volunteer involving organisations (Green Party/Comhaontas Glas, 2006, p. 4).
3. The 2006 Census was the first time that a question on volunteering had been included in a census and it revealed a 4% rise on previous figures (VI, 2010). However this question was not repeated in the 2011 Census.
4. McKenna notes that 20% of volunteers in 2009 claim to want to develop their skills set or gain valuable work experience, and 20% put 'free-time' or 'recently made redundant' as the main reason for volunteering.
5. In 1983 a UK museum journal described a situation very similar to that which exists today, and despite a gap of 20 years, job security is still a serious concern: '...it is understandable that...professionals and other employees should be afraid that an increasing use of volunteers...might put their jobs in jeopardy.' (Prestwich, 1983, p. 171)
6. Transparency and accountability are essential elements of the National Campaign for the Arts' petition to keep the arts on local and national agendas, and relevant policy creation can greatly contribute to this need for transparency (NCFA, 2010).

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