

Editorial

Example submission: Ambassador programme: a reflective analysis of a work- based project

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Abstract

This paper explores the creation and impact of an Ambassadors Programme within the youth development charity Seas Your Future. Triggered by sector pressures, the programme aimed to boost brand visibility, stakeholder engagement, and organisational resilience amid economic uncertainty. After an initial unsuccessful ambassador recruitment in 2021, a renewed approach in 2023, informed by motivational theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, successfully recruited 28 diverse ambassadors across the UK and internationally. Despite organisational challenges including voluntary liquidation and structural changes, ambassador commitment remained strong, underscoring the programme's effectiveness in fostering shared values and community alignment. The project enhanced the author's leadership, communication, and strategic skills while highlighting the importance of authenticity, transparency, and value alignment in sustaining engagement. Lessons learned emphasise the need for clearer long-term structures and risk management. This case illustrates how mission-driven ambassador initiatives can strengthen small charities' resilience and growth.

Keywords

Degree apprenticeships, work-based project, ambassadors, charity, volunteers.

Background

In response to increasing pressures within the third sector (Lambert et al, 2023), Ambassador Programmes (Obi et al, 2019) have emerged as strategic tools to extend organisational reach (Quinton et al, 2013) and increase stakeholder engagement (Kujala et al, 2022). A charity ambassador may be defined as a representative who

voluntarily advocates for an organisation's mission (Mikova, 2024), helping to strengthen external perceptions (Alder, 2024) and community alignment (Haddad, 2021). This paper examines the development of an Ambassadors Programme within youth development charity Seas Your Future (Seas Your Future, 2024), situating the initiative within broader discourses on brand visibility (Ha et al, 2022), stakeholder participation (Kujala et al, 2022), and resilience (Turner, 2024) in the face of economic and organisational uncertainty (Stanton et al, 2021).

Since joining youth development charity Seas Your Future (Charity Commission, 2025), in 2021, as their Degree Apprentice and Marketing and Communications Coordinator (Seas Your Future, 2024), a significant aspect of my position has involved contributing to the growth of the newly rebranded organisation (Lamerton, 2025). Upon my appointment, I was tasked with three primary objectives. This included, to generate additional funds enabling more young people to participate in our sail training programmes (Pelican of London, 2025), to raise the charity's brand awareness (Bilgin et al, 2022), and to establish new partnerships (Vestergaard et al, 2021) to ensure a continuous pipeline of young people for our annual voyages (Pelican of London, 2025).

In line with the charity's five-year development plan (Seas Your Future, 2020), there was a clear importance to develop an Ambassadors Programme (Obi et al, 2019) to support the overall growth of the charity (Malik et al, 2024). However, prior to my appointment, the charity had already attempted to recruit ambassadors immediately post-rebranding in 2021 (Lamerton, 2025). Ha et al (2022) refers to the importance of developing brand recognition in a charity, and this was still in progress, hence why the initial attempt was unsuccessful.

By 2023, two years after the first attempt and within three years of my employment at Seas Your Future (Charity Commission, 2025), I decided to take on the challenge of planning and launching the Ambassadors Programme (Pelican of London, 2025) as my work-based project (Horackova et al, 2024). This decision was informed by my ongoing interest in understanding what motivates people (Fishbach and Woolley, 2022) and my engagement with motivational theories (Morris et al, 2022), such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954) and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Peramatzis et al, 2022).

Furthermore, I recognised the value of ambassadors in enhancing a charity's visibility and credibility (Obi et al, 2019), as demonstrated by the impact of similar programmes in other charities (Hassler et al, 2025), for example Macmillan Cancer Support (Macmillan Cancer Support, 2025) and Barnardo's (Barnardo's, 2025). I felt confident that by this point, the charity's brand had matured sufficiently to attract a high-quality (Hadley et al, 2021) and diverse range (Hopkins et al, 2022) of ambassadors (Obi et al, 2019), thereby ensuring the success and sustainability of the programme (Pelican of London, 2025).

Reflection and analysis

The Ambassador Programme can be regarded as a notable success, both in terms of measurable outcomes and the personal pride I take in having led it (Obi et al, 2019). Its launch was supported by targeted social media campaigns (Reid et al, 2024) and strategic outreach initiatives, including personalised invitations, see appendix 1 and 2, sent from our CEO Adrian Ragbourne's (Charity Commission, 2025) email address (Stein, 2022). These efforts led to the recruitment of 28 ambassadors within just six

months of the programme's inception (Seas Your Future, 2024), a significant achievement for a small charity comprising only four full-time employees (Charity Commission, 2025). Ambassadors were provided with an Ambassadors Handbook, see appendix 3, which helped ensure clarity and consistency in their roles.

From the outset, I felt both excited and anxious about how the programme would be received. As numbers grew and a diverse range of individuals joined, my confidence increased. I felt particularly encouraged by the variety of ambassadors who signed up. This included, experienced tall ship sailors (Practical Navigator, 2025), academics (Rosewell et al, 2019), business professionals (Gavin, 2019), and young people (Ansell, 2016) aged 14 to 17. Their shared enthusiasm for our core mission areas (Pelican of London, 2025), youth development (Pelican of London, 2025), ocean science (Pelican of London, 2025), sail training (Pelican of London, 2025), and maritime careers (Pelican of London, 2025), was encouraging.

The programme's growth and the ambassadors' engagement exceeded expectations. With representatives located not only across the UK, Barrow-in-Furness, Plymouth, Kent, Liverpool, and London, but also internationally (Isle of Man, Czech Republic, Germany, and the United States) (Pelican of London, 2025), our reach expanded significantly. Ambassadors began representing us at public events such as the Barrow Festival of Transport (Visit Barrow, 2025), speaking at school assemblies, notably, our youngest ambassador Kveta from the Czech Republic spoke at her school which has led to more young people from the Czech Republic (BBC, 2023) joining voyages (Pelican of London, 2025). Additionally, ambassadors began to introduce us to their networks. These efforts directly created voyage partners for our 2025 and 2026 summer programmes (Pelican of London, 2025).

However, the process wasn't without its challenges. Midway through the ambassador programme, Seas Your Future, the operational name for Adventure Under Sail (Charity Commission, 2025), entered voluntary liquidation (Charity Commission, 2025). This resulted in the tall ship Pelican of London being transferred to a new charitable entity, Pelican of London Limited (Gov.uk, 2025). At this juncture, I was uncertain whether the ambassadors, originally affiliated with Seas Your Future (Seas Your Future, 2024), would remain engaged.

This period of uncertainty tested our cohesion and resilience. To my relief, all 28 ambassadors expressed a desire to stay involved (Pelican of London, 2025). Their decision reflected a deep understanding of the broader economic challenges (UN, 2025) and a recognition of our team's efforts to adapt. It was encouraging to see their loyalty and commitment transcend organisational change (Amis et al, 2021). Their ongoing involvement reaffirmed the strength of the programme's values and the community it had built.

Learning outcomes and future plans

Developing and implementing the Ambassadors Programme (Pelican of London, 2025) was a significant opportunity for both professional and personal growth. It deepened my understanding of strategic leadership (Singh et al, 2023) within a rapidly shifting organisational context (Stanton et al, 2021). Balancing programme design (Giancola, 2025), stakeholder engagement (Kujala et al, 2022), and organisational change (Amis et al, 2021) demanded resilience and adaptability (Turner, 2024), and affirmed that my strongest motivation stems from initiatives grounded in inclusion (Dawson et al, 2024) and participatory values (Jolly et al, 2021).

I acquired skills beyond my formal role, particularly in designing an engagement framework (Arnon et al, 2023) rooted in Herzberg's (Peramatzis et al, 2022) and Maslow's (1954) motivational theories. These models informed our recruitment and retention strategies (Hopkins et al, 2022; Chen et al, 2022), while communication skills were significantly strengthened.

The project reshaped my understanding of branding and internal communications (Bilgin et al, 2022; Saleh et al, 2024), particularly in sustaining volunteer engagement during a period of organisational uncertainty. The continued commitment of all 28 ambassadors (Pelican of London, 2025), despite the charity's liquidation (Charity Commission, 2025), highlighted the importance of authenticity (Malik et al, 2021), transparency (Jiang et al, 2023), and value alignment (Stein et al, 2021).

Other charities could implement similar programmes by ensuring alignment with core values (Stein et al, 2021), offering structured support (Verčič, 2021), and treating ambassadors as co-creators (Obi, 2019) rather than figureheads. However, success is context dependent (Ika et al, 2022). Our initiative benefited from a cohesive community (Pelican of London, 2025) with cultural factors (Knight, 2022) that may be absent in other settings.

In the future, I would embed clearer ambassador progression pathways (Kingsley, 2025) and establish risk management frameworks (Bracci et al, 2021) to respond more effectively to change (Errida et al, 2021). These insights will shape my ongoing commitment to inclusive, participatory, and values-led leadership (Wang et al, 2022; Nishii et al, 2022; Jones, 2023) and offer a replicable but flexible model for engagement across the charitable sector (Arnon et al, 2023).

Conclusion

To conclude, the development and implementation of the Ambassadors Programme (Pelican of London, 2025) marked a pivotal stage in my professional journey, offering real-world experience in strategic leadership (Singh et al, 2023), stakeholder engagement (Kujala et al, 2022), and resilience during organisational change (Amis et al, 2021). Grounded in motivational theory (Maslow, 1954; Peramatzis et al, 2022) and shaped by lessons in communication, branding, and inclusion (Bilgin et al, 2022; Dawson et al, 2024), the project demonstrated the value of mission-driven collaboration. Despite structural challenges (Charity Commission, 2025), the ambassadors' sustained engagement validated the strength of shared values (Stein et al, 2021). Moving forward, this experience will continue to inform my commitment to inclusive, purpose-led leadership (Nishii et al, 2022; Jones, 2023).

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