

Factsheet 12 Volunteer Policies

This factsheet is one of 2 on working with volunteers and should be read in conjunction with *Factsheet 13: Managing Volunteers*. The involvement of volunteers in any organisation can be a fruitful and rewarding experience for both volunteers and organisation. However, if the involvement of volunteers is not given enough thought and care then difficulties can arise. Below, and on the related factsheet, are some tips and ideas about how to successfully involve volunteers in your organisation.

Before recruiting volunteers think carefully about what they will be doing, how they will be supported, supervised, managed and motivated. The process of producing a volunteer policy, volunteer agreements and voluntary work outlines should result in volunteer roles becoming easier and clearer.

1: Developing a volunteer policy

The format of the policy and what you include in it will depend on the nature of the organisation and the work that volunteers do. A volunteer policy should detail your approach and commitment to volunteers, helping to define the relationship between organisation and volunteers and clarifying expectations and responsibilities. Developing consistent procedures should result in volunteers feeling more supported, recognised and motivated.

A volunteer policy can be a relatively short, simple document using clear language, which should be made available to everyone in the organisation. The policy should include statements on some or all of the following topics:

- Purpose - why does your organisation want to involve volunteers?
- Recruitment and selection – how will volunteers be recruited, will there be application forms, interviews and a probationary period?
- Volunteer tasks – what range of voluntary work is available in the organisation?
- Supervision and support – who will be responsible for this and what form it will take?
- Equal opportunities – does the organisation's policy include volunteers? All staff and volunteers should be treated in line with the Equal Opportunities Policy
- Insurance – are volunteers covered? It is important to ensure that volunteers are insured for the work that they do. For more information see *Factsheet 18: Insurance*
- Health and safety – volunteers should be made aware that they are covered by, and should work in line with, the Health and Safety Policy
- Grievance and disciplinary procedures – what systems are in place that cover volunteers? It is good practice to have clear, written guidelines on what will happen if problems arise
- Confidentiality – do volunteers have the same responsibilities for confidentiality as paid staff?
- Participation – are volunteers encouraged to participate in your organisation's decision making processes? This ensures democracy and can help to keep volunteers motivated and involved in the organisation

2: Volunteer Agreements

A volunteer agreement is a description of the arrangement between the organisation and a volunteer for the work they do. It outlines what a volunteer can expect from the organisation and what they agree to undertake. It will largely be determined by what is in the volunteer policy but is a specific document based on an individual volunteer's situation.

A volunteer agreement might include a voluntary work outline, but should include details of the organisation's commitment to provide adequate:

- Induction and training
- Equal opportunities
- Health and safety
- Expenses
- Support, supervision and feedback
- Insurance

And the volunteer's commitment to:

- Work to the best of their ability
- Follow policies and procedures
- Maintain confidentiality
- Make a specific time commitment
- Provide references if required
- Inform you if they are unable to do their voluntary work

Written volunteer policies and agreements should not create contracts of employment. In fact, a volunteer policy helps to clarify the unique contribution volunteers make to an organisation and shows how this is distinct to that of paid workers. In order to be certain of not creating a legal contract with volunteers here are a few simple measures that can be taken when creating formal documents:

- Avoid the language of legal rights and obligations, e.g. employer, contract, sick leave, etc.
- Insert a clear statement that no legal contract or relationship of employment is being created
- A contract is more likely to be implied if a volunteer is required to do something in return for something else. The organisation's expectations should be written in terms of hopes not obligations
- Ensure that your volunteer policy is a working document your organisation puts into practice when working with volunteers

3: Voluntary Work Outlines

An important part of a volunteer agreement is an outline of the work a volunteer will undertake. It is a good idea for volunteers to have specific roles rather than being taken on to help out the organisation in general. Without defined roles volunteers can lack direction or be given jobs that no one else wants to do. This could quickly lead to volunteers becoming de-motivated and leaving.

A voluntary work outline is similar to a job description and it can be relatively simple and less formal. It outlines what tasks a volunteer will perform and what skills and experience are needed. This helps to give volunteers and the organisation a clear idea of what they can expect from each other. A simple voluntary work outline should include:

- The tasks involved
- Skills and experience required
- Who the volunteer is responsible to
- Location of the job

4: Expenses

Volunteers should not have to incur costs to volunteer for an organisation. It is good practice to offer to pay all volunteers out of pocket expenses for costs incurred while volunteering, otherwise some people will be prevented from volunteering.

Expenses could be paid for the following:

- Travel
- Meals (usually if volunteering for over a minimum agreed period)
- Postage and telephone costs if working from home
- Care of dependants
- Protective clothing or essential equipment
- Costs of petrol used in the course of volunteering

Organisations should only pay volunteers *actual out of pocket expenses* and not fixed amounts per session or lump sums. Paying more than *actual* out of pocket expenses can cause two main problems:

- Volunteers may be penalised by the Benefits Agency or be liable to taxation
- It increases the possibility of organisations being classed as employers and therefore responsible for complying with statutory obligations (See *Factsheets 14, 15 and 16*)

5: Further Help

National Centre for Volunteering 020 7520 8900 www.volunteering.org.uk

Useful publication

Essential Volunteer Management – Steve McCurley and Rick Lynch Directory of Social Change

Publication ISBN 1 873860 62 5