

Full Guide:

Involving People in your Organisation

A Guide for Community and Voluntary Organisations

Overview and Purpose of this Document

- Why and how do you wish to involve volunteers in your organisation?
- What do volunteers need to know?
- What policies should you have in place to involve volunteers effectively, and safely?
- How can you minimise risks of misunderstandings, under-performing to expectations, or overstepping boundaries?

The needs of every organisation will be different, depending upon its size and culture and the nature of the role of volunteers. However, themes common to all organisations include the potential for volunteers to be engaged and invested in your cause or service; and to be powerful, effective voices in the community, speaking knowledgeably and persuasively about the good work performed by your organisation. Proper orientation of your volunteers prepares them not only for success inside your organisation, but also for the role of champion of your cause in the greater community.

This template is not exhaustive and further help and advice can be found through your local Volunteer Centre. Use it selectively, choosing, item by item, the components you would like to include in your organisation's own volunteer involvement handbook/manual.

You may find the samples a helpful guide. Give attention to the needs of your volunteers in the layout of your own handbook. For example, large font and generous white space is appreciated especially by mature volunteers or others who may have a visual impairment. Strive for a balance that equips your volunteers to be effective within and beyond your doors; somewhere between overwhelmed and under-informed. A well thought out volunteer orientation is an essential tool in building an effective volunteer force, and a first step in retaining valuable human resources.

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Volunteer Policy Document

A volunteer policy is the foundation on which your organisation's involvement of volunteers should be based.

Most organisations view the policy as a statement of intent, with the day-to-day nuts and bolts covered in separate policies or in a volunteer handbook. (covering Health & Safety, for example).

The Volunteer Policy should start with an explanation of what the organisation does and why it involves volunteers in its work - A statement of intent, setting out the principles that will form your involvement of volunteers – (for example, this is where to state that you will not use volunteers to replace paid staff)

Sample Volunteer Policy

Introduction

(Insert name of group) exists to _____

In line with this mission, (insert name of group) seeks to involve volunteers to:

- govern and guide the organisation
- ensure our services meet the needs of the communities we serve
- provide new skills and perspectives
- reflect the range of people and skills in the communities we serve.

Principles

This volunteering policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- (*Insert name of group*) will ensure that volunteers are properly integrated into the organisational structure and that mechanisms are in place for them to contribute to (*insert name of group's*) work.
- (*Insert name of group*) will not introduce volunteers to replace paid staff.
- (*Insert name of group*) will ensure that staff at all levels will work positively with volunteers, and where appropriate will actively seek to involve them in their work.
- (*Insert name of group*) recognises that volunteers require satisfying roles and personal development and will seek to help volunteers meet those needs, as well as providing training for them to do their activity effectively.

Further examples of volunteering policies can be obtained from DeVA (Devon Voluntary Action) contact us at support@devonva.org

Making a lasting impression - Recruiting Volunteers

We all want to feel that the service we offer is appreciated and valued whether we are paid or doing an activity on a voluntary basis. Ensuring you give the very best first impression is important when recruiting volunteers.

Recruitment Policy

This should be the same as your policy for recruiting paid staff, and include items on Equal opportunities training and expenses. Make sure you have a recruitment check list, follow it and you are more likely to succeed in recruiting the volunteers you need.

A sample check list:

- Advertised in: (X) location (ensure you advertise in a variety of places and in different media to reach a wide an audience as possible)
- Role Description: (describe the role, be specific, if you are looking for particular skills, say so)
- Organisation Description (Provide enough information about your organisation to allow the volunteer to understand the context in which s/he would be working. This will help to ensure a good match between your organisation and its volunteers, allowing them to decide whether their beliefs, values, skills and experience are a good fit for your organisation and the role advertised.
- Outline Benefits (list the benefits of volunteering with your organisation, i.e. volunteer social events, training opportunities)
- Volunteer selection process in place: (have a consistent approach to application forms, references, interviews etc.)
- Time scale (respond in good time to replies to your advertisements)
- Role requirements: (if a DBS check needs to be completed before the volunteer takes up the role ensure the volunteer is made aware of the need and the timescales involved)
- Staff and Volunteers aware of advertisement (ensure staff and volunteers that may answer calls from prospective volunteers are ready to answer questions and/or send out information)
- Give feedback – if a person has shown an interest in your organisation but are unsuitable for the role let them know you appreciate their interest and explain why at this time they have been unsuccessful

Also:

- Be flexible, volunteers are not paid and you may need to adapt a role around a volunteers circumstances
- Don't just recruit anyone – a wrong placement can cause more harm than good

Supporting Volunteers

Congratulations you have recruited a volunteer now you need to support them!

Welcome Letter

A letter of welcome to newly recruited volunteers from the head of your organisation can help to impress on the volunteer the ethos of the organisation and create a feeling of belonging and ownership. The letter can be brief and highlight some of the key aspects of the organisation and the importance of volunteers in fulfilling its purpose as well as its commitment to the wellbeing and support of the volunteer in their role within the organisation.

Provide an induction session

When new to an organisation it is difficult to know where you fit. Spend time orientating your new volunteer – time spent now will ensure misunderstandings are kept to a minimum. Develop an induction programme this may involve new recruits shadowing experienced volunteers. Use your Volunteer Handbook to highlight important aspects of their role.

Provide a Volunteer Handbook

Along with providing your volunteers with a copy of your organisation's leaflets and/or Annual Report, supply the volunteer with a handbook on policies that will affect them in their role. Give clear guidance on how they can claim back expenses etc. who their immediate supervisor is and any Health and Safety issues that will affect them.

Arrange on-going volunteer support sessions

These could be one to one supervision meetings or bringing a team of volunteers together so they can learn from each other and gain peer support. Make the sessions at suitable times and locations for your volunteers.

Develop Your Volunteers

Some people will be happy to come in week in week out carrying out the same role. Other people thrive on fresh challenges. When new projects or activities occur in your organisation speak to your volunteers, perhaps some would like the opportunity to try a new role or develop a skill.

Plan social events for your volunteers

Volunteers give their time for free for many reasons e.g. an increased social circle, friendship, access to activities and events. Volunteer social events enable volunteers to build relationships with each other and enhance a feeling of "belonging" to an organisation. They can be used as a method of recruitment with volunteers invited to "bring a friend".

Developing a Volunteer Handbook

Please download the accompanying information sheet 'Developing a Volunteer Handbook' for more guidance on this element of involving people in your organisation. It is available at http://www.devonva.org/information_and_guidance

Creating a Volunteer Agreement

A Volunteer Agreement is a document that can act as a reference point for the volunteers, and a reminder to the organisation that it should meet the standards of good practice that it has set itself.

Care must be taken to set out what the organisation will provide and how it will treat the volunteer and what it expects from the volunteer in such a way as to avoid the creation of mutual obligations, which could be regarded in law as creating a contract.

Typically in an agreement an organisation might commit:

- To provide a full induction and any training necessary for the volunteer role
- To provide a named supervisor for the volunteer, with regular supervision meetings
- To treat volunteers in line with its equal opportunities policy
- To reimburse out-of-pocket expenses where there are receipts or similar evidence of cost to the volunteer
- To provide insurance cover for the volunteers
- To implement good health and safety practice

A volunteer agreement might expect volunteers to:

- Follow the letter and spirit of the organisation's policies and procedures, including equal opportunities, health and safety and confidentiality
- To meet mutually agreed time commitments, or give notice if this is not possible.

Sample Document

Volunteers are an important and valued part of [name of organisation]. We hope that you enjoy volunteering with us and feel part of our team. This agreement tells you what you can expect from us, and what we hope from you. We aim to be flexible, so please let us know if you would like to make any changes to your role with us.

We, [name of organisation], will do our best:

- to introduce you to the organisation and your role in it.
- to provide any training you need
- to do our best to help you develop your volunteering role with us
- to provide regular meetings with your supervisor for mutual feedback. Your supervisor's name is [.....] to respect your skills, dignity and wishes and to do our best to accommodate them.
- to reimburse out of pocket expenses incurred while volunteering for us, up to our current maximum.
- to consult with you and keep you informed of possible changes.
- to insure you against injury you suffer or cause due to negligence.
- to provide a safe workplace.

- to apply our equal opportunities policy
- to try to resolve fairly any problems, grievances and difficulties you may have while you volunteer with us.

I, [name of volunteer], agree to do my best:

- to work reliably to the best of my ability
- to give as much warning as possible whenever I cannot work when expected to follow [name of organisation's rules and procedures, including health and safety, equal opportunities and confidentiality.

This agreement is binding in honour only, is not intended to be a legally binding contract between us. This agreement may be cancelled at any time at the discretion of either party. Neither party intends any employment relationship to be created now or at any time in the future.

CONCLUSION

Many excellent resources exist to support voluntary and community organisations in developing effective, successful volunteer programs that support mission-focused work. This template document was developed to provide a resource to organisations who expressed a need for guidance in the support of their volunteers. Additional resources, both print and electronic, are available through your local Volunteer Centre and Volunteering England

Some useful websites:

Volunteering England

www.volunteering.org.uk

Volunteering England Volunteer Managers Portal

www.volunteering.org.uk/vmportal

Know How Not For Profit

www.knowhownonprofit.org

Vol Resource

www.volresource.org.uk

And finally, a resource that must not be overlooked is the experience that managers of volunteers gain and can share with each other. We welcome contributions and recommendations to make this resource a valuable piece of collective wisdom shared for the benefit of the Voluntary and Community Sector.

For more information and support contact DeVA on 0845 6099901 or email us at support@devonva.org The full range of Information sheet are available to download at [http://www.devonva.org/information and guidance](http://www.devonva.org/information_and_guidance)

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