

Guidance notes for writing a Volunteer Policy

The following sections look at some of the information you may wish to consider including in your Volunteer Policy, and also sets out some of the questions you should be asking yourself as you draw up your policy. You may wish to include statements on all or just some of the following. You can divide your Volunteer Policy into 2 sections.

Section A

This section outlines the principles on which your involvement of volunteers is based

1. Principles

Start your policy with an explanation of what your organisation does, and why it involves volunteers in its work. This helps to put both the policy and the volunteer programme into context. It is also useful to include a statement of intent, setting out the principles that will inform your involvement of volunteers – for example, this is where to state that you will not use volunteers to replace paid staff and also to state that your organisation complies with the Data Protection Act in respect of keeping records on volunteers.

2. Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers

Include some or all of the following:

“In involving volunteers we recognise the right of volunteers to:

- *know what is expected of them and to be given clear information and induction;*
- *have clearly specified lines of support and supervision;*
- *respect confidentiality and privacy;*
- *be shown appreciation;*
- *have safe working conditions;*
- *be insured;*
- *know what their rights and responsibilities are;*
- *be reimbursed expenses;*
- *holidays and breaks;*
- *be trained and receive ongoing opportunities for learning and development;*
- *be free from discrimination;*
- *experience personal development through their participation as volunteers;*
- *ask for a reference;*
- *be consulted on decisions that will affect what they do;*
- *withdraw from voluntary work.*

Volunteers have the responsibility to:

- *carry out their tasks in a way which corresponds to the aims and values of this organisation;*
- *volunteer within agreed guidelines and remits;*
- *respect confidentiality;*
- *respect other volunteers, service users and staff;*
- *respect the human rights of others;*
- *carry out their tasks with a regard for others health and safety;*
- *attend training and support sessions where appropriate.”*

Section B

This section gives more specific policy statements

1. Recruitment and Selection

It's a good idea to include a couple of sentences about your recruitment process in the policy. Some points you may wish to include are:

- A statement regarding your organisations commitment to equal opportunities when recruiting and selecting volunteers.
- How will you advertise for volunteers?
- Will you use application forms?
- How will you interview volunteers?
- Will you request references?
- How will you deal with people you feel are not right for the particular volunteer role they are interested in?
- If your organisation works with children, young people or other vulnerable clients what procedures are in place for screening potential volunteers (i.e. DBS checks and self-declaration forms). State at what point in the recruitment process the DBS check will be requested, why this is required and the procedure for completing and returning self-declaration forms. You can then make reference to the other policies you have in place to deal with disclosures.

2. Induction and training

Include statements on induction training and also any trial period that your organisation operates. Also, state that volunteers will have equal access to training to enable them to develop their capabilities and personal competence appropriate to their volunteering role.

3. Expenses

Expenses are extremely important to volunteers and are also important to your organisation in helping to attract a diverse volunteer 'workforce'. Reimbursing volunteers' expenses means that volunteering is accessible to all, regardless of income. Including information about the reimbursement of expenses in your policy makes it clear that your organisation values its volunteers and is actively making sure that barriers do not exist to volunteer involvement. However, it is important that volunteers are paid out-of-pocket expenses only, or your organisation could fall foul of national minimum wage legislation and your volunteers may be open to investigation by the Inland Revenue and/or Benefits Agency. Let volunteers know that reasonable expenses will be reimbursed. You should give details of which expenses are paid and to what value.

4. Supervision and support

The kind of support that you provide for volunteers will depend on the type of work they are involved in. However, in most cases, volunteers should have a named supervisor and regular supervision meetings to discuss any problems or issues that may arise. You can also make reference to any group support sessions that are available.

5. Volunteer Voice

It is advisable to encourage volunteers to express their views on matters concerning the organisation and to facilitate this process you may wish to nominate a volunteer representative to sit on the management committee to liaise between the volunteers and the committee. You may wish to state in the policy that other volunteers will also be encouraged to stand for the management committee.

6. Insurance

Insurance is a very important issue, but one that many people forget about in relation to volunteers. Including a sentence about how volunteers are insured is an easy way of making sure that everyone who comes into contact with your organisation can see that volunteers are covered. Volunteers should be insured under either public or employer's liability cover.

6. Equal opportunities and diversity

While volunteers are generally not covered by equal opportunities legislation, it is clearly good practice to include them in your equal opportunities and/or diversity policy. Ideally, all your policies will have a commitment to equal opportunities and diversity at their heart. Restating your commitment to offering equal opportunity to volunteers from different backgrounds within your Volunteer Policy shows that you take the issue seriously and should indicate that all your organisation's other policies have been written with inclusivity in mind.

7. Health and Safety

Organisations have a duty of care to avoid exposing volunteers to risks to their health and safety. Your organisation should have a health and safety policy in place, with volunteers being made aware of the policy and practical safety issues as part of their induction. Including basic information about the policy in your Volunteer Policy is a good way of reminding people about it and signposting them to the health and safety policy.

8. Grievance and disciplinary procedures

What will you do if a volunteer has a grievance with your organisation? Or if a volunteer has acted in an inappropriate manner? Including information about grievance and disciplinary procedures shows that you have a well-planned strategy around involving volunteers and have thought ahead about how you would deal with any problems.

Make sure that you have clear procedures in place to deal with complaints by or about volunteers. It's a good idea to have separate procedures from those for paid staff, both to ensure that they are as understandable and user friendly as possible and to keep some distinctiveness between staff and volunteers.

9. Confidentiality

Volunteers should be bound by the same requirements for confidentiality as paid staff. Including information about this in your policy may well be helpful in calming some of the fears that staff or people working with your organisation may have about volunteers being 'unprofessional'.

10. Local Volunteering Sector/Networking

To demonstrate that your organisation's commitment to volunteering extends to the wider volunteering community, you may wish to include a statement on how you will develop relationships with the local volunteering sector, particularly in relation to the way you work with your local Volunteer Centre.

11. Review of Policy

Once you have developed your Volunteer Policy it needs to be reviewed regularly for relevance and revised as needed. Gaps in policy will continually surface as factors in the volunteering environment, the organisation, the community and the law change. The process of review can be beneficial in itself as it provides the opportunity to involve a range of volunteers, staff and management committee at policy level.

12. Responsibility for Implementation

Overall responsibility for the implementation, monitoring and review of the policy and procedures usually lies with the Chair of the Management Committee or Board of Directors and, on a day-to-day basis, with the senior staff/volunteers.