

Developing a volunteer policy for your organisation

A step by step guide

Congratulations! You have decided to recruit volunteers for your organisation. There is no doubt that you are about to benefit from a cost effective human resource, but your organisation is also going to benefit in other ways too:

- Volunteers are a true reflection of community spirit
- Volunteers extend an organisation's network
- Volunteers increase the diversity of an organisation so, what happens after you recruit your volunteers? Have you thought of the issues that might arise through the involvement of volunteers in your project? Are you and your organisation ready for volunteers?

Step 1: Why involve volunteers?

Before recruiting any volunteers, your organisation needs to be prepared. It needs to know why it wants to involve volunteers in its work, how volunteer positions fit into the organisation and it must be ready to receive willing volunteers when contacted. By having your organisation prepared you are preparing a positive experience for your volunteers, and ensuring that the right people will be assigned to the right opportunity.

"Always remember, happy volunteers tell people about their experiences, as do unhappy volunteers ... "

Every organisation should have a volunteer policy in place and this step-by-step guide is designed to help you through the stages of putting such a policy together. Obviously, this is a guide and will not necessarily apply to every organisation or to every volunteer, but your local Volunteer Centre will be happy to advise groups on an individual basis with specific issues. A formal policy gives clear guidelines for decision-making and instruction on how to carry through or act on decisions made. It also assists in the management of potential risks that might occur involving volunteers, such as accidents and abuse. It ensures that things run smoothly and that volunteers are properly recruited and well managed, and it serves as an aid to effectiveness, which allows the organisation to get the most out of its volunteers.

The first step in designing a volunteer policy is to decide why the organisation wishes to involve volunteers. This decision will:

- Determine the types of roles and responsibilities that the organisation will create for volunteers;
- Enable the organisation to better explain to volunteers how and why they are contributing to the work of the organisation;
- Enable the organisation to better explain to staff why volunteers are being sought;
- Enable the organisation to develop a plan for evaluating how effective their use of volunteers has been.

Step 2: After framing a volunteer policy

After examining what the organisation wishes to recruit and involve volunteer a policy can be laid out under the following heading

- Volunteer programmes
- Volunteer management procedures
- Volunteer recruitment and selection
- Volunteer training and development
- volunteer supervision and evaluation
- Volunteer support and recognition

The Volunteer Programme:

A brief description of how the volunteer roles are reviewed and valued within the organisation coupled with the organisation mission statement and the definition of a volunteer. It should also refer to the definition and rights and responsibilities of a volunteer.

The programme should broadly cover all volunteers from members of the management committee to project workers and state the position of the organisation on having clients and relatives of clients of the organisation as volunteers.

Volunteer training and development:

A statement should be made stating how each volunteer should receive initial orientation training and outline whom in the organisation should provide this training.

It should also be outlined how the organisation will support further education for the volunteer and/or support volunteers attendance at relevant conferences.

Volunteer management procedures:

A statement should be made referring to how volunteer personnel records will be kept and they will be treated with the same confidentiality as staff records.

Statements should also be made on how volunteers are expected to represent the organisation and how they are responsible for maintaining all the confidentiality of all privileged information to which they are exposed and how failure to do so could result in termination of the volunteers relationship with the organisation.

Issues such as dress code, timesheet and the issue of volunteer's workspace should also be dealt with here.

Volunteer supervision and evaluation:

Who will supervise the volunteers? Will it be one individual within the organisation or will supervision occur in a line management fashion? Who do volunteers communicate grievances to?

What is expected of volunteers in terms of absenteeism and who do they contact should they be unable to complete a scheduled duty?

How will volunteer performances be evaluated and by whom, and how will corrective action be outlined to volunteers.

How will the organisation handle to dismissal of a volunteer and what reasons constitute dismissal?

Volunteer recruitment and selection:

Under this heading, reference should be made to the volunteer role descriptions that volunteers will be given (similar to job descriptions given to staff members), how volunteers will be recruited and whether it is an on-going process. It should also outline the interview process. It is also advisable at this stage to outline the organisations position in relation to security checks on volunteers working with clients that fall into the at risk category and the organisations position in relation to collecting references for volunteers.

Will a probationary period be offered to all volunteers? How will the length of service of all volunteers and will leave of absence be covered?

Volunteer support and recognition:

Here it is important to state the organisation's position in relation to reimbursing volunteers for out of pocket expenses. Will the organisation refund bus fares, car parking or other such costs? Are all volunteers covered by the organisation's insurance policy?

How the voluntary effort within an organisation be recognised? Will there be an annual event? Or will each volunteer be recognised at a different time of the year?

Start small and make sure that your policy is distributed to everyone in the organisation and is 'owned' by the organisation. Get the input of staff in the issues outlined in step 2 and use them. It is not much use if you put a policy together and nobody else uses it and it sits in a file!

It may seem that there is not a lot involved in developing a volunteer policy but the award to doing so is immeasurable and can be summed up as followed.

"Their niceness will let you recruit a volunteer the first time but only your competence will let you keep them."

Managing volunteers within an organisation can be complex, but by preparing the organisation you are preparing a positive experience for those individuals that are prepared to give up their free time and commit to assisting your project aims.

Based on developing a volunteer policy by Volunteer Scotland.

Need some more help?

If you would like more help or advice in relation to this guide please get in touch with us:

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