



Guidelines for writing a volunteer handbook

Why is a volunteer handbook desirable?

A volunteer handbook can be an extremely valuable source of information for the volunteer and can help to explain why their role is so important to the organisation. It can also be useful as a back-up to induction or training, particularly where there is a lot of information to take in including background about the organisation and details and guidelines about their volunteering role.

Do you need a handbook?

If a large number of volunteers regularly support your organisation and if they tend to operate quite independently, a volunteer handbook can be very important in defining roles and limits of responsibility and making volunteers feel part of the bigger picture. If only a small number of volunteers are involved infrequently, then a handbook might not be a priority at this stage.

However, even if you feel that your organisation is small and friendly enough to do without a handbook, it's still worth having an induction or welcome pack of some sort, to collect together your policies and procedures for volunteers.

What information should a volunteer handbook contain?

Whilst this will largely depend upon your individual organisation, it can help to put yourself in the place of a volunteer and consider what information you might need to feel part of the organisation? Consult current volunteers to find out what information they would have liked to see written down. Some things about your working environment may seem perfectly obvious to you but could be mystifying to someone new to the organisation or equestrianism in general. Suggested information could include:

- **Background information** - explain what volunteers are doing and how they are helping
- **What does your organisation do and why?** - clarify for newcomers how your organisation is structured
- **Location** - where are volunteers most likely to be needed? eg home based or 'in the field'
- **Communication** – what methods are available for volunteers to stay in touch? eg email or printed newsletters; volunteers page on website; web forums; meetings etc
- **Training** – detail the training requirements for the role(s), how long each will take and opportunities for professional volunteer development
- **Expenses** – if your policy is to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses, the handbook can list those that you consider reasonable and explain exactly how to claim.
- **Practical health and safety information** – due to the involvement of the horse, there can be a unique risk attached to equestrian volunteering. You may therefore wish to include some basic safety advice for those unfamiliar with equestrian pursuits.

Other policies and procedures

Some organisations choose to collect together policies and procedures relevant to volunteers in their handbook. It can be a sensible thing to do, but they are probably best included in an appendix. Having them in the main text is likely to make the handbook a bit heavy going.

Accessibility

As with all volunteer documents, it's important to ensure that it is both accessible and readable. Use clear, informal language and ensure that it's concise and interesting. Remember that some readers may have sight problems, dyslexia or learning difficulties so using a clear sans serif font such as Arial at 12 or 14 point is desirable.