



Saying 'no' to a Volunteer

It's not easy to say no when someone has offered to volunteer for you, and it can be very hard to know how to deal with a volunteer who is persistently late, takes on tasks outside their remit, breaches confidentiality or fails to respect other people around them including volunteers, staff, competitors or clients. Such things are difficult enough to address with paid staff but when someone is giving their time for free, it may seem almost impossible. Early intervention is the best course of action, as leaving the problem may simply make it harder to sort out.

Prevention is better than cure, so establish good practice guidelines from the outset:

- Be clear about the tasks involved
- Define the boundaries of the volunteering role
- Clarify the expectations of both parties
- Ensure that good levels of support are provided

A **volunteer policy** and a clear description of the **volunteering opportunity** complete with skills, knowledge and attitude needed are useful tools. Not only will this present an accurate picture of the role, they can be used as a fair basis for explanation if it becomes necessary to reject a potential volunteer. Also, having a standard disciplinary procedure in place will help if further action is required.

If it is obvious from the outset that the person will not be suitable, it is better to say no at the beginning rather than taking the course of least resistance, letting them start and then having to go through the process of rejection. Be honest about saying no - *don't* say that the vacancy is full but you'll be in touch if the need arises. It isn't fair to raise false hopes and could ultimately lead to a lot of time wasting and even damage to the reputation of your organisation.

Be realistic about the type of volunteer you are looking for. Although equal opportunities suggests that volunteering should be open to everyone with no barriers, sometimes organisations just don't have the resources to provide the support a volunteer would need to have a safe and worthwhile volunteering experience.

A standard trial period for all new volunteers is a fair way of assessing the suitability of a volunteer for the specified task. This gives both sides the opportunity of addressing any problems that may have arisen and will also allow volunteers to exit gracefully if they so desire! An exit interview or questionnaire should be given, especially if the organisation experiences a high turnover of volunteers, as it can pinpoint areas for improvement.

If you require further information please contact Gill Barham on gill.barham@bef.co.uk