



Writing a Volunteer Policy

What is a volunteer policy?

A volunteer policy forms the foundations of any organisation's involvement of volunteers and should be written as a guide and point of reference for the entire organisation. It demonstrates an organisation's commitment to its volunteers and the overall principles that will govern how the volunteer programme is run. A volunteer policy should set out clearly all issues that affect volunteers, such as recruitment, role description, expenses, health and safety etc. It should also be a 'living' document, revised and updated regularly.

Why do you need one?

A written volunteering policy will clarify the role of volunteers within your organisation and ensure equality, fairness and consistency across the board. Volunteers will feel more welcome, valued and secure as they will know where they stand, what to expect and who to turn to if they have any concerns. Your volunteering policy should help to explain to paid staff, senior management and trustees how and why volunteers are involved in the organisation and what they will contribute to it. It should also be the key to overcoming potential barriers and encouraging the involvement of a diverse range of volunteers.

Things to consider

- Why does your organisation involve volunteers?
- What are the ways in which volunteers are or will be involved?
- How will they fit in to the day-to-day running of the organisation?

Consultation

Your volunteer policy should be relevant and up to date in reflecting the needs of the organisation. Consult as widely as possible and get as many contributions as possible. Make sure you involve:

- colleagues from all levels of the organisation.
- volunteers - so they don't feel policy is being imposed upon them.
- paid employees, in case they have any concerns about involving volunteers.
- senior management as this will help to give the policy credibility.

What to include in it

There are some specific issues which need to be addressed but, by and large, the volunteer policy will be unique according to the needs of the organisation. Many organisations prefer to have a short written policy that takes the form of a 'statement of intent' and which refers to other separate documents e.g. Health and Safety, Child Protection etc.



How to start

Start with an explanation of what your organisation does and why it involves volunteers in its work. Include the principles of volunteer involvement e.g. volunteers will not be used to replace paid staff. This will enable volunteers to appreciate why they are being asked to donate their time and how their efforts will help fulfil the aims of the organisation.

Recruitment

Include some information about recruitment processes, such as:

- How will you advertise for volunteers?
- Will you use simple application forms?
- How will you interview volunteers?
- What will you do about references?
- Will you be taking up Police Checks?
- 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 vulnerable clients, what procedures are in place to protect both them and volunteers?
- If possible, draw up some outlines of volunteer roles.
- Include a simple diversity policy or statement.

Recruiting for Diversity and Equal Opportunities

It is important to safeguard against discrimination. Some things to keep in mind:

- Present a positive image of volunteering
- Try and work out what will 'hook' your target audience
- Use appropriate images, but beware of stereo-types
- Make sure publicity material is easy to read (font - style and size - minimum 12 or 14 point -, colours etc)
- Don't use jargon, acronyms or complicated words
- Consider producing information on tape, video or in Braille
- Translate information into other languages if appropriate

Induction and Training

- Consider how you can make sure new volunteers are welcomed into the organisation.
- Include some information about how volunteers are inducted and trained.
- State if you wish to include a trial period.
- Will *appropriate* training be available to volunteers?



Expenses

It is standard good practice for an organisation to reimburse any reasonable, out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers. It may be appropriate to list those expenses that will be reimbursed e.g. mileage, parking, public transport, meals, child care etc.

Insurance and Health and Safety

Adequate insurance cover, including Public Liability, should be provided to cover all volunteers. Information about building safety, use of equipment, first aid, health and safety training, protective clothing (if necessary) etc. should be provided.

Role Descriptions

It is a good idea to draw up a variety of sample volunteer role outlines, including estimated time commitment. This means that volunteers will have a clear description of the tasks their role involves, providing a good base to start from and preventing later confusion. It is important to remember that such outlines can be reviewed and revised by mutual agreement, as part of the ongoing supervision and support of the volunteer.

Supervision and Support

This should set out the kind of support provided to volunteers and could be extremely beneficial for paid employees as well, to reassure them about their own roles in relation to the volunteers.

- The type of support will depend upon the sort of work volunteers are doing.
- Generally, volunteers should have a named supervisor.
- Regular supervision meetings to air any problems or issues that may arise.
- Define how the roles of paid employees relate to those of volunteers.

Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures

Making sure you have clear procedures in place to deal with complaints by or about volunteers demonstrates that you have a well-planned strategy around the involvement of volunteers and have thought ahead about how you would deal with any problems. It is preferable to have separate procedures from those for paid staff, both to ensure that they are relevant and user-friendly and also to maintain the distinctiveness between paid staff and volunteers.

Confidentiality

Volunteers should be bound by the same requirements for confidentiality as paid staff. By including this in your policy, you will allay possible fears from paid staff or people working with your organisation about volunteers being 'unprofessional'.