

Developing a Volunteer Policy

What is a volunteer policy?

A Volunteer Policy is a document that outlines an organisation's commitment to how volunteers will function within the organisation. For new organisations this is best done before setting up volunteering opportunities and for organisations already working with volunteers, who don't have a volunteer policy, it is a good way to review and revitalise your commitment to your volunteers. A volunteer policy is useful to both staff and volunteers, clarifying the roles, rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

Why is it good practice to have one?

Having a volunteer policy serves a number of purposes:

- It serves as evidence that the organisation has thought about and recognises the importance of good and consistent standards of practice.
- Proves your commitment to quality volunteering - to staff, funders, volunteers and other organisations.
- Educates the whole organisation on the importance of volunteers
- Ensures everyone has a coherent understanding of why volunteers are involved and what volunteers can contribute
- Clearly sets out your position on important issues and can be referred to at need

How to create a volunteer policy

When creating a volunteer policy, there is no need to start with a blank piece of paper. Many organisations have volunteer policies; so local groups you work with or know of, may be able to give you a copy of theirs. It is important to involve many people in the consultation, i.e. your staff, volunteers, service users, members, trustees etc. Even if one person takes responsibility for writing it, input is important from those who will be affected by it.

In many cases it may simply be a case of writing down what is already done, but in the course of writing it can often become apparent that things can be done more effectively or, especially in larger organisations, more coherently.

Below is a guide to what you should include in

your policy.

About the organisation:

- Mission statement, aims and objectives
- The relationship to national parent bodies and local voluntary or statutory bodies
- Who the organisation is for
- When the organisation is open.

The people:

- Why the organisation involves volunteers
- The person who has responsibility for co-ordinating the work of volunteers and specifically the person who is their line manager

Equal opportunities and diversity:

- The organisation's commitment to ensuring that volunteering is open to everybody

Recruitment:

- How volunteers are recruited
- The interview process
- Will the opportunity require a Criminal Record Check
- Whether or not references are taken up
- Details of expenses and provision of any clothing or equipment

Task descriptions:

- A commitment to ensure that volunteers should have a clear description (ideally in writing) of what tasks they are expected to perform
- A statement that volunteers are not restricted to doing these tasks and that volunteers may discuss changing the tasks if appropriate.

Agreement:

- Agreement of the level of commitment given by the volunteer
- What the volunteer should do if they are unable to attend

- What the volunteer or the organisation needs to do to terminate the relationship.

(It should be made explicit on the Volunteer Agreement that the Agreement is not intended to form a contract of employment.)

Induction and training:

- The organisation's induction programme for all new volunteers
- Training given to volunteers
- The purpose of training and any expectations arising from that training.

Support:

- The nature of support given to volunteers.
- Volunteer team and support meetings
- Volunteer representation on the management committee
- Commitment to events, which recognise and promote the value of volunteers.

Insurance and health and safety

- Details of Public Liability, Employers Liability or other insurance covering volunteers
- Statement that volunteer drivers need to inform their insurance company in writing that they are using the car for voluntary work
- The organisation's responsibilities for the health and safety of everyone it involves, including volunteers and visitors. Information should include details of the proper use of equipment and protective clothing as well as building safety, first aid, health and safety training etc.

Confidentiality

- Statement outlining the importance of confidentiality
- Outline of how confidentiality will be dealt with.

Grievance and disciplinary procedures

- Statement outlining procedures in place to deal with complaints by or about volunteers

Volunteer expenses

- Reimbursements offered including travel expenses, lunch etc.
- How expenses are paid and the system for being reimbursed.

Car mileage rates

- Mileage allowance
- Details of the tax implications of mileage payments.

Do's and don'ts

- Things volunteers should and should not do.

Introducing the policy

The policy should be written in clear English. If it is unnecessarily complicated or difficult to understand, people will simply ignore it. All staff and volunteers should receive a copy of the policy. Making it part of your induction pack will guarantee that new staff and volunteers will not be left without a copy.

Revising the policy

The flexible nature of volunteering means that circumstances can change much more quickly than for paid staff and so it makes sense to review the policy every year to adapt or improve it.