



Factsheet/Advice Sheet No. 5

Good Practice Guide for Volunteer Involving Organisations July 2007

This is one of a series of Factsheets for voluntary and community groups issued by West Norfolk VCA.

Good Practice for organisations which use Volunteers

Good practice covers everything that concerns your volunteers. Before rushing in to recruit volunteers, you need to evaluate:

- How are you going to use the volunteers?
- Who is going to look after them?
- What are your volunteers going to do and have you got the facilities to allow all volunteers to be involved?

If you are just starting out on your voluntary programme you should spend time thinking about all of the good practice requirements. These will help your organisation to set up a really successful volunteering programme.

West Norfolk VCA can help you create a Volunteer Policy for your organisation. We can also undertake criminal Records Bureau checks for you – contact us for more details.

Recruitment and Selection

Most organisations consider a wide range of advertising methods e.g. posters, word of mouth, local media, along with using the Volunteer Bureau. Existing volunteers are often an excellent way of finding new people. Once a potential volunteer comes forward it is necessary to set up a selection procedure that treats everyone the same. If you decide there is not a role for the interested volunteer, it is all right to say no, but you must take the time to explain to the volunteer why, especially when you are still advertising for volunteers. If you don't advise someone why they were not suitable word could get round that your organisation no longer needs volunteers or even worse doesn't treat volunteers as equals.

You may also wish to think about the following:

Reasons why people volunteer:

- Feeling needed/feeling useful
- Having spare time
- Wanting to give back/helping others
- Gaining experience for employment – a means to an end

- Learning new skills
- Mixing with others/socialising
- Achieving something and improving self esteem
- A challenge – something new
- Keeping active in retirement

Reasons for people not volunteering:

- Lack of training
- No out of pocket expenses
- Lack of interesting placements
- Lack of knowledge/opportunities
- Level of risk/fear
- Fear of losing benefits
- Lack of transport
- Seen as filling gaps – cheap labour
- Not being motivated or appreciated

Employee or volunteer?

The difference between an employee and a volunteer is that an employee has an agreement that involves payment or a commitment. This may seem fairly straightforward. But volunteers also sign agreements stating that they understand what the organisation expects of them and will do their best to turn up on time and follow policies and procedures etc. So **beware !**

Do make it clear to the volunteer that this is a statement of what will happen ideally and that it is not legally binding. Don't include a commitment to volunteer "for at least 6 months". If the written details make it sound like a commitment placed on the volunteer, it will be a "contract". This means that he/she can claim the Minimum Wage for hours worked! (For similar reasons don't pay e.g. a set weekly allowance for travelling. This will be counted as a "consideration". This also might result in an entitlement to claim the Minimum Wage. You should only reimburse for travelling actually done – see below under Volunteer Expenses.) If in doubt, seek advice from us.

Taster Days

A taster session is an excellent way of allowing both the potential volunteer and organisation a chance to see if it is going to work out. At the end of the session, time should be set aside to discuss 'how it went', and would the volunteer like to continue.

Induction Procedure

All volunteers should be given an induction about the organisation they are volunteering for. This should include a tour of the building or site, health & safety, how to claim expenses (if applicable), roles and responsibilities and the aims and values of the organisation – what do we believe in, and what are we trying to do?. You should strive to include volunteers who know lots about your organisation, are enthusiastic, and feel valued for their contribution and as a result will be the best possible ambassadors for your organisation.

Training needs

Some may also need further training specifically to the Voluntary Role, or Customer Care, or Working with People with Disabilities, and/or particular aspects such as Moving and Handling, Food Hygiene, or Basic First Aid, etc. We can always advise you where these and other courses are available. Making the effort to provide relevant training says a lot about how you value the volunteer.

Time Out

Apart from holidays, from time to time volunteers may need to have some time away from their volunteering. Try to be understanding and if possible leave their voluntary role open for their return.

Equal Opportunities

Organisations should all work towards providing an equal opportunities environment. Sometimes this is hard to achieve e.g. language and access barriers, but you may be denying your organisation valuable volunteers. It may well be worth putting adverts in places/papers read by minority groups.

Confidentiality

You must respect any personal information given to you from the volunteers. Equally you must make it clear to your volunteers the need for confidentiality when dealing with information about service users, staff or other volunteers.

Volunteer Expenses

It is accepted that good practice includes basic out-of-pocket expenses e.g. travelling to their voluntary placement. If your organisation is unable to pay out-of-pocket expenses you must discuss this with the volunteer.

It is also good practice to discuss the procedure for claiming and paying expenses with each volunteer, on an individual basis. Some volunteers may require weekly reimbursement; some never wish to claim them.

If you are able to pay expenses it might be a good idea to ensure volunteers claim them as this will give you a realistic picture of how much it costs to run the organisation when it comes to submitting funding applications. If the volunteers do not wish to claim expenses they could claim them and give them back as a donation.

Undertaking appraisals

You should have a very clear policy on whether or not you undertake appraisals for volunteers and let the volunteer know your policy as part of the induction. This way there will be no surprises along the way.

Another thing to think about is the terminology - what do you call the appraisals? Some people might be put off by the word appraisal as it may sound too formal, so you may wish to call them joint progress reviews or something similar.

What are the pitfalls of appraisals to volunteers?

- Don't know what to expect
- Opposed to complicated process and complicated forms
- Volunteers may feel they are being criticised
- Fear of the unknown
- Raising expectations and not fulfilling them (people might get fed up and leave)

What are the benefits?

- Volunteers feel that they are appreciated, listened to and supported
- Increases self worth, builds confidence
- Volunteers can contribute to the organisation positively – they feel part of a team, often resulting in them offering more time
- Adds structure to the volunteer's work
- Volunteers are kept up to date
- Standards are maintained
- Maximises effectiveness of work carried out
- Identifies any problem areas
- Highlights strengths and weaknesses
- Gives the volunteer an opportunity to have 'their say'
- Documented progress – enables references to be given

Finally

It is also important that you provide information to your volunteers on things they should and should not do. Many volunteers need these guidelines; it may also help your organisation if there are any disputes

Further information and advice is available from :

West Norfolk VCA, 16 Tuesday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 1JN
 Tel. 01553 760568 Email: chris@westnorfolkvca.org

Further reading :

National Minimum Wage and Expenses – National Centre for Volunteering Information Sheet