

Volunteers and Good Practice

➤ **The Law**

When welcoming volunteers into your organisation or project it is important to bear in mind that there are legal issues to be aware of. For example it is particularly important not to unwittingly create a contract of employment or contract of services that place legal obligations on your organisation. The best way to avoid this is to make no payments to your volunteers other than reimbursements of genuine out of pocket expenses. If you want to pay your volunteers even token amounts you should seek advice.

To avoid confusion it is a good idea to have a volunteer agreement which covers what you expect from the volunteer and what your organisation is committed to in return. If writing an agreement be careful not to use words associated with employment, such as contract or employment, instead express hopes and expectations not obligations. You may want to get help with writing a Volunteer Agreement or other useful documents such as Volunteer Role Descriptions or a Volunteer Policy.

➤ **Role Descriptions**

Volunteer role descriptions are a good idea so that you know what actually needs doing and potential volunteers can see if it's the right role for them. A description should include the main duties and details of the role such as your location, as well as necessary skills, experience and personal qualities. It is essential that any role descriptions are not discriminatory, so make sure you have an equal opportunities policy and follow it.

➤ **Policies**

A volunteer policy is particularly important, so that your organisation's approach and commitment to volunteers is clear. It helps volunteers know what they are there for and how they can expect to be treated. You may wish to use it to refer to other documents that are important to your volunteers, such as a Volunteer Agreement, your Health and Safety and Equal Opportunities Policies, or even a Volunteer Handbook if you have a lot of information to share with volunteers. Your Volunteer Policy should include an introduction and statement of intent as well as explanations of your recruitment procedures, induction and training, support and supervisions,

expenses, insurance, equal opportunities, health and safety, grievance and disciplinary procedures and confidentiality. You may also want to cover whether you will ask your volunteers to obtain a disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau.

➤ **CRB Checks**

It is a good idea to get your volunteers CRB checked if they are going to be working with children or vulnerable adults on a regular or unsupervised basis. Registered bodies can obtain disclosures from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), a 'one stop shop' for criminal record checks and now the only place where organisations can police check their volunteers. If you are not a registered body you will need to find an organisation that is happy to apply for disclosures on your behalf.

This information sheet is part of a series produced by Norfolk Information, a partnership of second tier organisations supporting the voluntary and community sector in Norfolk.

We have taken all reasonable steps to ensure that this information is current and accurate. We cannot, however, guarantee its accuracy or completeness and therefore cannot accept liability for your acting, or failing to act, upon the information given.

For resources, books, ideas and useful information please contact West Norfolk Voluntary and Community Action on 01553 760568 or email info@westnorfolkvca.org