

Voluntary Action-**Leeds** Volunteer Policy

Stringer House, 34 Lupton Street, Hunslet, Leeds LS10 2QW

DEVELOPING A VOLUNTEER POLICY

If an organisation has decided to involve volunteers, it should produce a written record of the main points and principles on which have been agreed. This record may then form the basis for producing a 'Volunteer Policy'. Such a policy can provide a useful framework within which all those involved (members, paid staff, management committees and volunteers) can work and demonstrate their clear commitment to promoting volunteering. Below is a list of sound reasons for developing a policy on volunteers, followed by suggestions on the sorts of issues to consider for inclusion.

Why is there a need for organisations to develop a policy for volunteers?

- It promotes volunteering.
- It clarifies the role of volunteers.
- It outlines the rights and responsibilities of both volunteers and organisation.
- It stresses the importance of good practice and demonstrates that the organisation is aiming towards this.
- It implies that volunteering and the contributions made by volunteers are being taken seriously and, therefore, volunteers are valued.
- It may be regarded as a 'statement of intent' thus demonstrating that volunteers play a major role in the organisation.
- It raises the credibility of organisations. Voluntary/statutory/community groups, potential funders and bodies e.g. insurers are likely to view it more favourably.
- It could be seen as a professional approach to volunteering, setting (high) standards which other groups working with volunteers could emulate.
- This, in turn, could lead to consistency within organisations and within the voluntary sector as a whole where 'good practice' becomes the norm.

- It can enable an organisation to further promote Equal Opportunities.

What issues need to be considered for a 'Volunteer Policy'?

Organisation:

- A mission statement -i.e. the 'purpose' of the organisation. .A set of clear aims and objectives.
- Who the organisation is for, i.e. the 'client user' group.
- Times when the organisation provides the service.
- Relationships to local voluntary/statutory bodies and any national parent body.

People:

- Outline the role of the management committee.
- Specify the person responsible for co-ordinating the work of volunteers.
- Involve the line manager of the volunteer co-ordinator.
- Involve any other people who may be responsible for supervising volunteers. Consider volunteer participation in terms of their role as service providers, their level of involvement at a decision/policy making level and, if applicable, their role on the management committee.

Equal Opportunities:

- Demonstrate a commitment to volunteering being a right open to everyone.
- Ensure volunteers agree to adhere to the 'Equal Opportunities Policy'.

Recruitment / Selection :

- Detail how volunteers are recruited.

- Outline the interview process.
- State whether or not references are taken up.
- Decide on what further checks, if any, need to be undertaken. An example could be police checks for volunteers working with children.
- Give details of expenses and provision of any special clothing or equipment.
- Consider having a 'counselling out' procedure (an open discussion where it is suggested that the opportunity is not right for the volunteer and that other alternatives could be found). This should include a clause stating that inappropriate volunteers will be offered either alternative voluntary work, or be referred on to other organisations who may be able to help.
- Job Descriptions / Person Specifications / Portfolio of Tasks:
- Have 'Job Descriptions' for each of the volunteering tasks.
- Have 'Person Specifications' relating to each job description.
- Have a 'Portfolio of Tasks' containing the range and choice of voluntary work.
- Consider stating volunteers are not restricted solely to the tasks outlined in their job description, thus enabling them to change if they want to.
- Have a statement saying volunteers are not to replace paid workers, or do tasks which should be, or have previously been done, by paid workers.

Agreements:

- Write a set of *suggestions* and *guidelines* negotiating the level of involvement of the volunteer(s). This will form the basis of a volunteer agreement.
- Outline what volunteers should do if they are unable to attend.
- Insert a clause referring volunteers to organisational policies and procedures.
- Have a procedure whereby a volunteer or the organisation can terminate, for whatever reason, the agreement.

- Do not form a contract of employment with volunteers.

Training / Induction:

- Indicate that all volunteers will receive proper induction.
- Stipulate that all volunteers have a right to, and will receive, training.
- Outline the purpose of training and any expectations arising from that training.

Support:

- Outline the nature of support given to volunteers both in relation to situations occurring in the organisation and at home. Particularly relevant are details of emergency procedures (e.g. details of who to contact, how, numbers etc.).
- Ask volunteers what kind of help and support they want!
- Give details of volunteer team and support meetings.
- Consider volunteer representation at staff meetings and on the management committee.
- Demonstrate a commitment to recognising and promoting the value and contribution of volunteers.

Insurance and Health & Safety:

- Give details of relevant policies e.g. public liability, which cover volunteers.
- A statement informing volunteer drivers to advise their insurance company, in writing, that they are using their vehicle for voluntary work.
- Outline organisations' responsibilities regarding all aspects of health & safety instructions/training for proper use of equipment, protective clothing, building safety, first aid training and any other similar issues which may be relevant.
- Consider having a 'risk policy' for those volunteers involved in working in challenging situations or where they may experience challenging behaviour.

Confidentiality:

- A statement outlining the importance of confidentiality.
- A set of guidelines for how confidentiality will be dealt with by the organisation.

Volunteer expenses:

- Ensure reimbursement for all 'out of pocket' expenses is offered.
- Detail reimbursements offered, e.g. travel expenses, mileage rates, etc
- Detail the procedures for claiming / paying expenses.
- Advise volunteer drivers regarding any tax implications for mileage payments.
- Assure those volunteers on benefits, that payment of 'out of pocket' expenses will not normally affect their benefits adversely.

Volunteer on benefits:

- Ensure the right of unemployed people to volunteer.
- Enable this to happen by paying expenses.
- Advise volunteers to notify the benefits office.
- Consider the potential difficulties faced by people in receipt of incapacity benefit and procedures people should follow to deal with these.

Miscellaneous rights and responsibilities to consider:

- Develop a grievance procedure for volunteers or enable them access to any existing staff grievance procedures.
- Develop a disciplinary procedure for volunteers or include them in any existing staff disciplinary procedures.

- Acknowledge volunteers are entitled to time off for sickness Holiday / compassionate leave etc.
- Developing a procedure to follow if volunteers are unable to attend. Develop a statement saying that volunteers are entitled to a reference.

Do's and Don'ts:

- Have a list of "Do's & Don'ts" -a set of user-friendly guidelines of what volunteers should not do (e.g. open the post, talk to the media, etc.).

Monitoring, Evaluating & Reviewing:

- Consider having a system for monitoring and evaluating volunteer tasks.
- Draw up agreed procedures for regularly reviewing the 'Volunteer Policy'.