



**Volunteer** *Centres*

LeicesterShire

**LeicesterShire  
Volunteer Centres  
Network**

[www.volunteeringleicestershire.org.uk](http://www.volunteeringleicestershire.org.uk)

**Good Practice  
Guide to  
Involving  
Volunteers**

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## INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are intended to assist organisations with the effective management of volunteers. Good practice does not require any specialist knowledge. Mostly it takes common sense and the imaginative ability to put you in the position of volunteer. How would you like to be treated? Are you made to feel welcome and useful?

The recruitment and management of volunteers is not dissimilar to the recruitment and management of staff, but unlike paid staff, volunteers have no reason to stay if they do not enjoy their work, so it is important that they are managed well. One bad experience can put people off volunteering, sometimes permanently.

Very few organisations can afford to employ a dedicated volunteer manager. In most organisations, particularly small ones, the person responsible for volunteers combines this with many other roles. Some people who take on this role are themselves volunteers.

Therefore, the aim of this Good Practice Guide is to give you some simple guidelines, and practical suggestions which will help you to attract, involve and support volunteers effectively, and have an exit strategy when they move on.

This guide has been produced by LeicesterShire Volunteer Centres, an active network of Volunteer Centres working in Leicester City and Leicestershire. We hope you find it helpful and useful. Details of your local Volunteer Centre can be found on the contact list enclosed with this booklet, please contact your local office if you would like more information or if we can be of further assistance.

## **WHAT DO VOLUNTEER CENTRES DO?**

Volunteer Centres (sometimes called Volunteer Bureaux or Local Volunteer Development Agencies) provide support at a local level for individual volunteers and volunteer involving organisations.

They have six core functions:

### **Brokerage**

To match both individuals and groups interested in volunteering with appropriate opportunities in the local community. They hold information on a comprehensive range of opportunities, and offer potential volunteers support and advice matching their motivation to volunteer with appropriate volunteering opportunities.

### **Marketing Volunteering**

To stimulate and encourage local interest in volunteering and community activity. This may include promoting and marketing volunteering through local, regional and national events and campaigns.

### **Good Practice Development**

To promote good practice in working with volunteers to all volunteer involving organisations, including training for potential volunteers, existing volunteers, volunteer managers and the volunteering infrastructure.

### **Develop Volunteering Opportunities**

To work in close partnership with statutory, voluntary and private sector agencies as well as community groups and faith groups to develop local volunteering opportunities. They understand the potential offered by the local communities and work with them to realise this potential. They will target specific groups which face barriers to volunteering. Volunteer Centres work creatively to develop imaginative, formal and non-formal opportunities for potential volunteers.

### **Policy Response and Campaigning**

To identify proposals or legislation that may impact on volunteering; to lead and/or participate in campaigns on issues that affect volunteers or volunteering; and to campaign proactively for a more volunteer-literate and volunteer-friendly climate.

### **Strategic Development of Volunteering**

As the local experts on volunteering, to inform strategic thinking and planning at local, sub-regional, regional and national level.

## WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING?

Volunteering is defined in the Compact Volunteering Code of Good Practice as:

An activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives.

There are four principles fundamental to volunteering:  
Choice, Diversity, Mutual Benefit and Recognition.

**Choice:** Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. Freedom to volunteer implies freedom not to become involved.

**Diversity:** Volunteering should be open to all, no matter what their background, race, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, age gender, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

**Mutual Benefit:** Volunteers offer their contribution unwaged but should benefit in other ways in return for their contribution. Giving voluntary time and skills must be recognised as establishing a reciprocal relationship in which the volunteer also benefits and feels that his or her contribution is personally fulfilling.

**Recognition:** Explicit recognition of the value of the contribution of volunteers is fundamental to a fair relationship between volunteers, voluntary and community organisations and government policy and practice. This includes recognising the contribution to the organisation, the community, the social economy and wider social objectives.

## WHY INVOLVE VOLUNTEERS?

Although volunteers are not paid for their work, they are not just a free gift. Involving volunteers takes resources such as the time to recruit manage and support them, space and equipment, and the cost of reimbursing out-of-pocket expenses. A better way to think of volunteers is that they are an **investment** – although you do need to invest time and resources, it will yield rewards in the long term.

### **Good reasons to involve volunteers might include:**

- To enable your organisation to offer more support or services to your users;
- To widen participation or involve more diverse groups of people, or allow channels for more local input. Volunteers can bring with them a different perspective to an organisation - one that reflects the views of the community or client group;
- For their energy and enthusiasm;
- They have a different relationship with your users, knowing they are there because they want to be not just because it is their job;
- For smaller organisations, volunteers can bring a variety of skills, experience and enthusiasm that may otherwise be unavailable to them;
- Volunteers can add credibility to an organisation - giving their time free of charge suggests that the work must be of value.

A not-so-good reason to want volunteers might be: to do the things no-one else wants to do. It should be noted that volunteers are not a substitute for paid staff positions.

A useful way to think about this is: If we suddenly had all the funding we could wish for to pay staff, would we still want to involve volunteers? If so, why? What is special or distinctive about what volunteers can offer?

The answer to this question should:

- Clarify your reason for wanting to involve volunteers
- Determine the roles and responsibilities that your organisation will create for volunteers
- Enable you to explain to volunteers how and why their involvement contributes to the overall aims and objectives of the organisation
- Enable your organisation to develop a plan for evaluating how effective the involvement of volunteers has been

### **Volunteering is most likely to work well if:**

- The organisation has clear reasons for involving volunteers and acknowledges and recognises what they contribute
- Trustees/managers, staff, volunteers and users are all clear about why volunteers are there, and committed to supporting them
- The roles of volunteers are clearly defined, so that paid staff do not feel undermined or threatened
- There is an organisational culture which values the involvement of volunteers and makes sure it has the resources to support them properly.

## WHY DO PEOPLE VOLUNTEER?

Volunteering is a two way relationship. Volunteers give their time for free. While altruistic motives are often involved, individuals often also have personal and professional expectations of the experience.

### WHY SHOULD SOMEONE VOLUNTEER WITH YOUR ORGANISATION?

People who want to volunteer have a wide range of opportunities to choose from, and they will choose the one which seems to offer the best 'fit' to their personal combination of motivations. It is best to be clear from the start about what you can offer to volunteers – and what, realistically, you can not offer.

Focus on what is positive about volunteering with your organisation. What would make them choose you, rather than another organisation? What is special or distinctive about volunteering with your organisation?

Think about:

#### What your organisation does

Why does your organisation exist? What is the organisation working to achieve or change? Who or what does it want to help, support or empower? This is a strong motivation for people who need to feel strongly about a cause – and can be more powerful than the 'job satisfaction' of the actual task that a volunteer is being asked to do. Think of all the volunteers who stand in the street with a collecting tin! You might also want to consider: What is distinctive or unusual about how your organisation works to achieve its aims? What do you do that other, similar organisations don't?

*It's difficult sometimes because the people who use the service are often angry or upset, and don't always appreciate that we're volunteers. But the organisation does a fantastic job – anyway, it's not about making me feel good, it's about helping people whose lives are at rock-bottom and making sure they aren't ignored or forgotten.*

*I'm looking to change career – I want to do something that makes a difference to people's lives. But I don't know whether I'd be any good at it, or whether I'd cope, so I want to try it out before I commit – it's a big step.*

#### The development opportunities you offer

What is interesting, exciting or challenging about the volunteer roles that you offer? Do you provide useful training? Some people are looking for something that will challenge or stretch them, or the opportunity to take responsibility. Do you offer the opportunity for direct contact with your users or clients? – This is particularly useful experience for people seeking to explore a new career, or who need to get work related experience.

*I wouldn't want to be paid for what I do – I'd hate the responsibility. I love having a regular pattern of coming and helping out, and not having to worry about it or 'take it home' with me.*

#### Being part of your organisation

Some people volunteer because they lack confidence, or don't have much structure in their lives; others for a sense of belonging or to meet people. Not everyone wants a challenge. For some people routine, low responsibility activities provide them with a sense of structure and achievement, or the opportunity to get back on their feet after a period of illness or isolation. If you can offer a warm, supportive environment where volunteers feel part of a team, this might be something to emphasise.

## DEVELOPING A VOLUNTEER ROLE DESCRIPTION

What do you want volunteers to do?

It is good practice to have clear volunteer role descriptions which set out what volunteers can expect to do and what you will provide to enable them to do this. Start by listing all the tasks which volunteers could help with, and then group these into defined roles. This does not have to be inflexible; you may sometimes prefer to work in a way that responds to what volunteers can offer and creates a role for them. A role description is a useful checklist of things to consider so that you and the volunteer are both clear about the role and expectations.

Volunteering opportunities that are boring or unsatisfactory may lead to recruitment difficulties and a high turnover of volunteers. It is worth being flexible and creating volunteering opportunities that are what people want; interesting, challenging and rewarding, as they attract volunteers who will be enthusiastic and committed.

Your role description could helpfully include:

### **Organisation name and key information about the organisation**

This should include the organisation's aims and objectives/mission statement (if you have one), a brief description of the activities or services provided, and details of who benefits.

### **Volunteer role**

It can be helpful to give the role a title which sums up what the volunteer will be doing – for example 'befriender', 'mentor', 'office assistant'

### **Tasks and responsibilities**

List all the tasks and responsibilities that the volunteer will be asked to undertake. If the volunteer will have a choice of which tasks they do, or if it will depend on their skills/experience, then make this clear (or divide them into more than one role description).

### **Location**

Where will the volunteer usually be based? If this is in the community, state what the geographical limits of your service are and whether volunteers can choose to be placed close to home.

### **Responsible to**

This should give name and role of the person who will manage and support them.

### **Hours/time commitment**

Give an indication of how much time this role will take up and how frequently. If you need volunteers to be available on specific days and times, say so. If the hours are flexible, what are the limits of this flexibility? E.g. 'volunteers are asked to commit for a regular shift of 2 hours per week during our normal opening times of 10-4, Monday to Thursday'. If you are asking for long term commitment, be specific about this, and state the minimum you would accept. (Be aware, though, that you can not legally bind volunteers to this). Do not include unnecessary restrictions, as you may put off potential volunteers unnecessarily – if it is negotiable then say so.

**Skills required**

Recruiting volunteers tends to be inclusive rather than competitively selective – so only include skills/experience which are really necessary for the role. Consider whether you would really turn someone down who did not have the particular skill but who was enthusiastic. Could you train them in some or all of the necessary skills? You could separate this out into skills which a volunteer *must* have, and skills which would be *useful* (but which are not necessary).

Try to avoid including personal qualities or personality traits, unless they are really relevant to the role, as these are subjective and can be off-putting. If you must include them, try to phrase them in a way which relates directly to the role. For example, for work which involves telling lots of people about your organisation's work you might say 'able to deal confidently with talking to a wide range of people' rather than 'bubbly and outgoing'.

If there are other restrictions on what kinds of volunteers you will accept, this is the place to say so. For example if the project is women - or men - only, wants volunteers who have personal experience of the issue they will be dealing with, or if there are age restrictions. You need to explain these and to be sure that they are essential to the role, not discriminatory or based on stereotypes or prejudices about certain kinds of people, particularly if the anti-discrimination legislation would prevent you from using them if you were advertising a paid job. For example 'volunteers must be over 18 as they need to be mature enough to work unsupervised' – why 18? Would you turn down a sensible, mature 17 year old and accept an unreliable, irresponsible 50 year old?

**Benefits to the volunteer**

What specific benefits will this role offer? Think about what might motivate people to take on this role?

**Training**

What training and induction will volunteers be offered and how does it relate to their role? Is this required (they have to do it before they start volunteering) or is it optional? When and how often does training take place, and how long does it take? Is it formal, informal or 'on the job'? Is ongoing training available if volunteers want to increase their knowledge or develop their role? Can volunteers access external training courses?

**Support and supervision**

What support and supervision is offered to volunteers and how will it be provided? Is it formal or informal? You might want to include opportunities for peer support such as volunteer social events or support sessions.

**Expenses**

It is good practice to make sure that volunteers are not out of pocket. Include here information about what expenses are reimbursed to volunteers, how volunteers should go about claiming them and what the arrangements are to do so.

## GETTING VOLUNTEERS ON BOARD

### What happens when a potential volunteer gets in touch for the first time?

From the volunteer's point of view, they are offering you a gift – they are offering to give you their time for nothing. So if the organisation is slow to respond, unenthusiastic, or unwelcoming, this can seem most ungrateful!

Bear in mind the difference between recruiting volunteers and recruiting paid staff. For job recruitment, the process is usually competitive for the applicants. There is a deadline, and there are several candidates and the role of the recruitment and selection process is to choose the most suitable and reject the others.

For volunteer recruitment, this is not generally the case – usually the process aims to include as many people wanting to volunteer as possible, rather than to exclude all but one successful candidate. In fact the competition is often the other way around. There are many other organisations wanting volunteers and many other organisations for volunteers to go to. So they are selecting you! If the process feels too formal or too like making a job application this can be off-putting to some people.

### This means that:

- You need to respond quickly to any expression of interest (or at the very least to explain and apologise for any delay).
- The initial contact needs to be friendly, welcoming and enthusiastic. It need not be the person who manages volunteers if someone else (e.g. the administrator) is more easily available – but whoever it is needs to be well-informed, approachable, able to answer questions and tell the enquirer what will happen next.
- You need to give volunteers all the information they need to make an informed decision. The aim should be to encourage volunteers to make the next step and commit themselves, if they want to do so, and to say so without embarrassment if it is not right for them. It may be best, initially to do this verbally (in person or over the telephone) rather than sending lots of written information, giving them the opportunity to ask questions. You can then send written information to clarify what you have said.
- The information you need from the volunteer should be relevant to the task and asked for in a way that is not too off-putting. For example, asking for details when you meet the volunteer rather than presenting them with a 10-page 'application form'.
- Try not to make it feel too much like a selection process (unless this really is the case) – for example a 'visit' or 'chat' sounds less intimidating than an 'interview'.
- If there is a screening procedure (references or Criminal Record Bureau checks) then take time to explain what is involved, what information will be needed and why you need to do them.
- Having made the offer of help, volunteers need to know what happens next and to have any delays explained to them.

## SELECTION AND SCREENING

Selecting volunteers is about finding a good match between the prospective volunteer and the opportunity on offer. It is an attempt to find a successful blend where the person has the right skills, experience and enthusiasm and the opportunity satisfies the needs and interests of the volunteer.

Every year thousands of people volunteer. Almost without exception these volunteers are keen to give up their time and efforts for the benefit of others without payment. Lack of care in accepting volunteers can, unfortunately, lead to dissatisfaction and disappointment for both the individual and agency when a person is placed in an inappropriate opportunity, causing the volunteer to stop working with you or any other agency.

In a very small number of cases, lack of care in selection could lead to serious danger for the service user. Good selection procedures recognise that the vast majority of volunteers deserve our best efforts to find suitable opportunities for them, whilst at the same time setting up careful acceptance procedures so that a very small minority will not be placed in positions where vulnerable people may be at risk.

### **Record keeping**

However informal or short-term the volunteer opportunity, and even if you don't have a formal selection or screening process, it is wise to ask for and keep a record of:

- The volunteer's name and address, with some proof of identity
- Contact details
- Details of their next-of-kin or an emergency contact
- Information about any medical conditions or allergies which their manager and/or colleagues might need to know about

### **Application/Registration form**

You might want to ask a volunteer to complete a basic application form, although if this is too much like a formal job application this can be off-putting, and some volunteers may need help to complete it. However it does give a potential volunteer an opportunity to tell you something about themselves and their reasons for volunteering, and provide you with a basic personnel record.

### **Interviewing Volunteers**

There are a number of reasons why organisations find it beneficial to interview potential volunteers:

- It provides you with a chance to explain more about the work of your organisation and how volunteers fit into its activities.
- It gives you the opportunity to assess the suitability of the volunteer and enables you to make sure they have the skills and qualities that you need, or to match their skills most effectively to a suitable role.
- It also gives the volunteers a chance to decide whether your organisation is the right one for them, thus saving everyone's time.
- It helps to ensure that all volunteers are given the same opportunity to find out about the role and to demonstrate their suitability.

Plan your interview carefully in advance. You need to get the right balance between professionalism and informality, so that the experience gives the volunteer

confidence that the organisation is efficient and well-organised, but is not so intimidating that it scares them away! A badly conducted interview will put volunteers off. You may also want to address, before the interview, any fears that a volunteer has; and to explain whether it will be a formal selection process or just an informal chat.

### **Planning an interview:**

- Make sure that all staff know that a potential volunteer is coming and ensure that someone is available to welcome them.
- Have any background information to hand as the volunteer may ask you questions.
- Draw up a list of questions in advance based on the volunteer task description. Remember the interview is your main selection tool.
- Use open questions. As an interviewer you should be doing more listening than talking (except when giving information).
- If you are interviewing several volunteers, you may need to take notes. It is less intimidating if you explain to the volunteer why you are making notes, just in case they think they have said something wrong.
- If you are not going to make a decision during the interview, then tell the volunteer when you will let them know.

Remember the aim of the interview is to match the right person with the task. It is useful to try and find out what motivates each volunteer and then match this to a suitable opportunity. A good interviewer will give the volunteer an opportunity to 'self-select', i.e. to reject the task if they feel it is not right for them.

### **References**

No organisation should be satisfied with only the information provided by the prospective volunteer. Some form of independent verification is essential good practice.

Some organisations ask for all references in writing; others prefer telephone references. It is sensible, both for practical and equal opportunities reasons, to make a checklist of questions to ask and to keep a written record of points raised in telephone references, especially if the reference is unsatisfactory.

The questions asked, whether verbally or in writing, should verify how long the person has known the volunteer, and for how long, and should ask specific questions which relate to the task description and required skills for the role the volunteer will be performing. You might also want to ask whether the referee would have any concerns or doubts about offering the person this role. When asked specific questions, it is much harder for a referee to conceal any doubts or concerns than it would be in a bland, general 'character reference'.

It is not sensible to accept, without further investigation, written references produced by a prospective volunteer, since the provision of such references is frequently a term of settlement for a contested dismissal from paid employment. Such references are also open to forgery.

You will need some guidelines on who you will accept as a referee, and how long they must have known the person. Remember that some volunteers, especially if they have been ill or out of paid work for a while, or if they have recently come to the UK, may find it difficult to suggest a referee, particularly if they assume you expect an employment reference. You might have to suggest alternatives such as a teacher, tutor, social worker, health professional, volunteer manager or neighbour; or be prepared to arrange for translation of a reference from overseas.

### **Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Disclosure Checks**

Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, ex-offenders have the right not to reveal 'spent' (old) convictions after a certain period of time. Some types of occupation or service are exempt from the Act, particularly those which involve working with children or vulnerable adults. Where a position is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, you can carry out a Standard or Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau disclosure, either directly (if you are registered with the CRB) or through an umbrella body.

The types of work and role which are exempt from the Act, and which justify a CRB Disclosure check, are clearly defined; and if you do carry out CRB Disclosure checks you are legally required to abide by the Disclosure Code of Practice in relation to how you use, store and apply the information, including a written policy on the involvement of ex-offenders. The 'More Information' section of your local Volunteer Centre will be able to tell you where to find out.

It is worth remembering that a high proportion of people have a criminal conviction of some kind. Few of them will have any ulterior motives for wanting to volunteer, and there is no evidence to suggest that a volunteer with a criminal record is any more likely to offend than a volunteer who has not. Outright rejection of ALL ex-offenders hugely narrows the available volunteer base and the human potential on offer to an organisation. You should therefore have in place policies or procedures which avoid excluding or discouraging people who have committed minor or irrelevant offences, or whose offences were many years ago. It is good practice to indicate that a conviction does not necessarily disbar a volunteer from consideration, and to give an indication of what types of conviction would disbar a person from a particular role.

You should also remember that CRB checks do not, in themselves, guarantee the safety of your users – they only identify people who have been caught in the past. They should only be used as one tool in a Safety Culture which takes steps to minimise risk and risky situations, and which gives staff, volunteers and users the confidence to raise concerns, knowing that they will be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Screening should not be used as a substitute for good selection procedures. Adequate support, training and supervision are necessary wherever volunteers are working with any vulnerable group of people.

## **Other Checks and Balances**

It is important to develop the best possible procedures to ensure that your organisation protects its clients. The following are useful:

- Policies or statements on safeguarding the welfare of clients, access to money and property and other matters where abuse, fraud or breach of trust may occur. The work of the organisation should be planned in a way that minimises risks.
- All clients or service users should be clear about how to complain to an independent person if they are unhappy about the actions of a worker or volunteer. If clients are unable to make their own complaints, additional safeguards may be needed to monitor workers and volunteers.
- Agreed procedures for protecting people, property and the reputation of the organisation should be applied to all; and all workers/volunteers should understand what their work involves and the limits of their activities.

## **TURNING A VOLUNTEER DOWN**

Sometimes you will not be able to accept someone's offer to volunteer. For example if you do not have space for someone in this role at the moment, or if there is a good reason why you think they would not be suitable. It is tempting just to avoid the issue and hope that they will lose interest, but this gives a very bad image of your organisation and of volunteering in general.

The best way to handle this is to let them know quickly and explain why. Let them know that you appreciate their offer and be as honest as you can. It's important to handle this sensitively – think how upsetting it is to be rejected after a job interview, and how much more so when the person is offering to work for nothing. If possible, suggest another organisation which might be more suitable, or refer them to the local Volunteer Centre to explore other options.

## INDUCTION AND TRAINING

Training is the process of equipping volunteers with the essential skills needed to perform the tasks associated with their volunteering. It should be proportionate to the responsibilities that a volunteer will have. Some roles (for example giving advice, or working with vulnerable people) may require extensive training. Other roles may need only a brief orientation or induction.

In the same way, some volunteers find training an incentive, or feel that it demonstrates that their role is valued whilst others just want to get on with the job they came to do. You might want to distinguish between offering the *opportunity* for training, and making it *obligatory*.

**Obligatory** induction or training will cover the things that volunteers really **need to know** (for example, the aims and ethos of the organisation, what their role involves, the policies and practices they will be expected to abide by).

**Optional** training should offer the chance for volunteers to learn more or develop their role (for example, more about the work of the organisation and the issues that it is dealing with, the opportunity to learn a new role or take on more responsibility) – if they want to. Remember that some volunteers appreciate the structure and security of volunteering – and may not want any to change or to develop their role.

You can provide the information and learning experiences that volunteers need in a variety of ways, and you may want to provide some information more than once or at different times:

**Informal/ face to face**

One to one induction, coaching, supervision or support sessions, volunteer meetings, peer support or social events

**Written information**

Guidelines, information pack, policy documents, volunteer handbook, websites

**Formal/structured training**

Courses, workshops, talks and lectures, distance learning packs

Bear in mind that some volunteers will have had limited or adverse experiences of training and education in the past. You might want to deal in advance with any fears or preconceptions that volunteers might have about attending training courses or workshops.

### BASIC INDUCTION GUIDELINES

All volunteers will need an induction or orientation into your organisation - it gives you the ability to explain how, why and where you operate, where they fit in, and what will be expected of them. It should provide them with enough background and practical knowledge of your organisation to allow them to understand their contribution; and to show a new volunteer that they are a welcome addition to the team.

To assess what induction and training a volunteer will need requires answers to 3 questions:

- What **information** does a volunteer need to carry out their role?

- What **skills** does a volunteer need to carry out their role?
- What **attitudes or approaches** does a volunteer need to carry out their role?

You should aim to answer 3 basic questions:

1. Why should I be volunteering here?
2. How will I be volunteering here?
3. How do I fit in with everyone else?

### **1. Clearly explain the purpose of your group**

- Your mission statement and the values of your organisation (i.e. the purpose of the organisation or project and what it is trying to achieve)
- Information about your users/clients/beneficiaries
- A brief history of the organisation
- An overview of current services, projects or activities
- Any future plans for the organisation's development

The aim of this discussion is for the volunteer to understand and commit themselves to the basic purpose of the organisation.

### **2. Clarify how volunteers fit into this**

- An explanation of where volunteers fit into the structure of the organisation, and how they help it to achieve its objectives
- The policies and procedures they will be expected to abide by, and the boundaries of their role
- An introduction to any facilities, premises and equipment they will be using
- A description of the expectations that the organisation has of a volunteer, and what they can expect from the organisation

The purpose of this is to allow the volunteer to understand where they fit into the bigger picture, and to help them find their way around.

### **3. Set out the social context in which the volunteer will be working**

Included in this section is:

- An introduction to the leadership and structure of the organisation
- A welcoming by staff and current volunteers
- An personal introduction to key staff and other volunteers, particularly those who will be working with or managing them
- A description of the values and ethos of the organisation. This might be the place to cover in more details policies such as equal opportunities and confidentiality, and to clarify how volunteers will be expected to behave towards users and colleagues, as a representative of the organisation

This allows volunteers to make personal connections that will help to sustain involvement, and to feel comfortable and confident in their interactions with other people.

## **SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION**

Good support and supervision is about finding an effective balance between the needs of the volunteer and the needs of the organisation. Because volunteers are not paid, they will stay only if they feel enthusiastic and motivated. The organisation needs to make sure volunteers' energy and enthusiasm is harnessed effectively to benefit the organisation.

### **SUPPORT is largely about encouragement and reassurance to the person:**

- To focus on the volunteer as a person
- To listen, and create an environment where a volunteer is able to express him/her self
- To reassure where necessary
- To make sure the volunteer feels that their work is valued
- To be alert to possible changes or personal issues affecting the volunteer
- To give (and receive) feedback, both positive and negative – support does not exclude constructive criticism
- To pick up on any concerns or problems the volunteer has with their work and deal with them before they become more serious
- To assess training needs and facilitate personal development

### **SUPERVISION is largely concerned with the tasks being done by the volunteer, and encouraging the person to be most effective in their volunteering role:**

- To evaluate progress, set objectives and agree future action plans
- To give guidance in work based tasks
- To address any problems early and deal with them in a constructive way
- To make sure the organisation is accountable for the work being done
- To provide a forum for discussion, clarifying priorities, enabling decision making and agreeing on change

The balance between support or supervision, the level of supervision, and how closely you manage any particular volunteer, will depend on many factors, such as:

- How experienced the volunteer is and how long they have been with you;
- The role of the volunteer and the level of responsibility they have;
- The potential for things to go wrong (and how serious the problems could be);
- Whether they are doing work that needs to be monitored or which has to meet organisational targets;
- The personal circumstances of the volunteer;
- How often you are in contact with the volunteer and whether this contact is in person or by telephone, e-mail or post;
- What type of work they do and where (on-site, at a distance or in the community);
- How a volunteer currently feels about their role agency, other volunteers and staff, and whether there are any issues of concern;
- The methods you use to supervise staff doing similar work;

It may vary from person to person (some volunteers will come with more confidence or experience than others and some may need more encouragement or reassurance)

and may change over time (e.g. as volunteers become more experienced, take on new roles, or if their personal circumstances change)

## **VOLUNTEER SUPPORT**

Volunteers are more likely to feel valued, accepted and satisfied with their roles if your agency provides adequate support. In its various forms, support helps to provide an opportunity to offload problems, gain feedback and learn from the experience of other volunteers and paid staff.

Well supported volunteers will find it easier to cope with their task and provide a better service, with the added benefits for your agency and possible clients.

### **Which support?**

Methods of support for volunteers vary from one agency to the next. However, some of the most frequently used are:

- open door - where the volunteer co-ordinator is always available to volunteers
- regular telephone calls or e-mails volunteers - especially for volunteers who work away from the agency
- specific session times when the co-ordinator is available to volunteers
- regular, one-to-one supervision sessions
- meetings of staff and volunteers
- meetings solely for volunteers
- a volunteer newsletter or notice board
- regular social or training events

Each of these methods have their own merits and pitfalls. For example:

- An open door policy is very convenient for the volunteer, but makes it difficult for the co-ordinator to time-manage effectively, and may mean that a few vocal volunteers dominate your time. Other volunteers may be concerned not to 'bother' you, and you may not become aware of problems until it is too late
- Specific session times allow more structured control of the co-ordinators time and may help you to focus on the task rather than trying to juggle volunteer support with other priorities. However the times may need to vary to fit in with volunteers' schedules. Problems can arise if several volunteers arrive at the same time.
- Group meetings allow volunteers to share ideas and opinions, but can be dominated by a minority and not be appropriate for volunteers who have individual or personal issues to raise, or who do not feel confident to speak up in public.
- Regular, one-to-one supervision is the best way of making sure all volunteers are supported properly, but can take up a lot of time, and you may need to make sure volunteers do not find the idea daunting and are put at their ease.

With these pros and cons in mind, a support programme that involves two or three of the above is advisable to cater for all needs.

Clearly defined and well advertised forms of support are necessary. Volunteers will not respond to vague offers of support unless there is an identifiable means by which they can obtain it. If you expect volunteers to attend support sessions and it is a requirement of their volunteering then it should be made clear when a volunteer first offers their time.

## **Balancing the needs of the organisation and the needs of volunteers**

As a matter of principle, it is important that all volunteers have equal access to a basic level of support, although you may want to commit some extra support to those volunteers who may otherwise not consider volunteering, or who are experiencing a difficult time.

People who manage volunteers also need to be aware that the support demanded by some volunteers may be out of the boundaries of the agency. It is important to discuss support with volunteers, and to be realistic if you do not believe your agency has the necessary resources of time or staff. Good support and supervision is about finding an effective balance between the needs of the volunteer and the needs of the organisation.

It is important that the person managing volunteers is clear about their own boundaries. Volunteers will inevitably want to share their problems with someone they know and trust, but spending too much time on individual support means that less time is available to other volunteers.

## **VOLUNTEER SUPERVISION**

Supervision is the time spent with a volunteer finding out how they are getting on and how they are fitting in with your agency, its aims and goals. It is normally done on a one-to-one basis with the volunteer. Volunteers should be encouraged to bring their own agenda to a supervision session and see it as a time where they can freely and confidentially express their thoughts, opinions and doubts. For the member of staff it is an occasion to be informed about work undertaken, planned or forgotten about. It is an opportunity to assess progress, identify problems and plan for the future.

### **Points to be raised in supervision:**

- Always put the volunteer at their ease and select the venue carefully.
- Does the volunteer have any issues they wish to raise?
- How are relations with staff, volunteers, clients and management?
- Are there practical problems emerging (e.g. expenses, health & safety)? Are there any policy issues over which the volunteer or supervisor has concerns?
- Would the volunteer benefit from any extra training?
- Are there any comments on the way the agency works?
- Does the volunteer have any personal matters to raise?
- This is also the time for you to give feedback to the volunteer on their work. Always begin with positive feedback, about specific things they have done well. It is important that any criticism is specific, based on their behaviour and constructive and that any changes are clearly agreed with the volunteer.

Consideration should be given to the recording of supervision sessions. It is a matter for each agency to decide whether they will keep records of supervision sessions, where any records will be kept and who will have access to these records.

## VOLUNTEER EXPENSES

One practical way of making sure that volunteers feel supported and valued is to make sure that they are not left out of pocket. Not every volunteer will want or need to claim expenses, but for people who are unemployed or on a fixed or low income such as benefits or a pension, this can be a real issue. Even quite small expenses such as a bus fare can make volunteering too expensive for some people.

### **Expenses which organisations can legitimately offer to volunteers include:**

- Travel expenses from home to and from the place of volunteering
- Travel expenses in the course of volunteering  
(Either a mileage rate for volunteers who use their own car, or the actual cost of bus, rail or taxi fares)
- Meals or refreshments provided by you, or reimbursement of the actual cost of meals or refreshments taken while volunteering
- The cost of specialist clothing, materials etc. required to volunteer
- Childcare costs, or the care of adult dependants, while the carer is volunteering

**Volunteers should always be reimbursed the actual cost of their expenses**, with documentary evidence to back this up (e.g. a receipt, bus ticket or mileage record). You need to be aware that if you offer 'flat rate' expenses (however small the amount), or if you pay them more than the actual cost (e.g. if you 'round up' the amount you give them) or if you explicitly offer volunteers perks with a monetary value in exchange for a certain number of hours work, you may inadvertently be creating a contract of employment. It can also create problems for volunteers on welfare benefits. Contact your local Volunteer Centre for guidance if you think you might be doing this.

You need to make sure that there is an organisational culture which encourages volunteers to claim expenses, without feeling guilty or uncomfortable, and a clear process for doing so. If volunteers don't want expenses, encourage them to claim them and donate them back to the organisation (if they are tax payers and sign a Gift Aid declaration, charities can then claim back the tax) – but there should be no pressure for volunteers to do so.

Some organisations, particularly small voluntary organisations or community groups, may not have the resources to pay expenses. Some volunteers will leave or choose another organisation as a result – so you might want to make a commitment to paying expenses in future, and to include volunteer expenses as a budget item in future funding applications.

## KEEPING VOLUNTEERS MOTIVATED

### **Volunteers are more likely to stay if they:**

- Feel appreciated and recognised by the organisation
- Are used effectively and can see that their work is needed
- Feel that they are doing something worthwhile and that they do make a difference
- There is the flexibility for them to be able to change or develop their role or commitment if they want to
- Are provided with an opportunity for learning, skills development and personal growth
- Feel confident that they can handle the tasks they are asked to do
- Are adequately supported and supervised
- Have a sense of belonging and being part of a team, and are given opportunities to socialise with others
- Are consulted about their work and have the opportunity to contribute to policy and decision making if they want to
- Are accepted and supported by other volunteers and paid staff
- Feel that their personal needs and motivations are being met

### **Volunteers are likely to leave if they**

- Feel unappreciated or taken for granted
- Have too many demands made on them or on their time
- Are asked to do things they don't feel equipped to cope with
- Are given too much involvement and responsibility – or too little
- Have unrealistic or unclear expectations of their role
- End up out of pocket
- Don't enjoy what they do or feel that it's not valuable
- Feel that their time is being wasted or their work badly organised
- Feel isolated

## DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

If volunteers know what is expected of them, and are properly trained and supervised, it is less likely that things will go wrong, and that any problems that do arise are dealt with quickly and effectively.

However it is a good idea to consider:

- **What a volunteer can do if they have a complaint about the organisation, a member of staff or another volunteer**
- **What you will do if you are unhappy with the behaviour of a volunteer**

### COMPLAINTS MADE BY VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers need to know who they go to if they have a complaint about the organisation, a member of staff or another volunteer, and to be confident that their complaint will be taken seriously and handled sensitively.

#### **Making a complaint – a sample policy for volunteers**

\_\_\_\_\_ (name of organisation) is concerned about the welfare of its volunteers and takes any complaints seriously. If you have a complaint about the organisation, a member of staff or another volunteer, the following procedure should be used to make the organisation aware of the problem.

Stage 1: You should first of all raise the matter informally with your supervisor.

Stage 2: If this does not improve matters, or if the complaint is against your supervisor, you should request a meeting with \_\_\_\_\_ ( a senior manager or trustee) and put your complaint to them. The person you are complaining about will have the opportunity to respond, and to take steps to improve the situation if necessary.

Stage 3: If after \_\_\_ days there is still reason for complaint, then you should put the complaint in writing to \_\_\_\_\_ (a senior person such as the chief executive or chair of the trustees). They will investigate the problem and let you know the outcome, and any further steps that will be taken, in writing within \_\_\_ days of receiving your complaint.

## COMPLAINTS ABOUT VOLUNTEERS

It is good practice to have a clear and transparent procedure for making sure that complaints are handled fairly, and to make sure volunteers are aware of this and have access to a written copy of the procedure.

The first step is always to try to resolve the issue informally, by talking to the volunteer. They may be unaware that there is a problem, or they may be bored with or unsuited to the role. Further training or a change of role may resolve the problem.

### **An example of a policy for dealing with complaints about volunteers**

\_\_\_\_\_ (name of the organisation) is committed to treating volunteers fairly and to making sure that any complaints about volunteers' behaviour are dealt with in a fair and transparent way, giving volunteers the opportunity to put their case.

If a complaint is made about a volunteer's behaviour, the following procedure will take place.

Step 1: In the first instance, the volunteer's immediate supervisor will discuss the matter informally with the volunteer to try and resolve the problem.

Step 2: If this does not solve the problem, the volunteer's supervisor will arrange a formal meeting with the volunteer to discuss the problem, giving the volunteer the chance to respond to the complaint. An informal warning may be made and steps agreed to change the volunteer's behaviour.

Step 3: If there are further grounds for complaint, a formal meeting will be arranged between the volunteer, volunteer supervisor and \_\_\_\_\_ (a senior person within the organisation, for example the manager or a trustee). A formal warning may be issued, and the volunteer made aware that if the volunteer repeats the behaviour they will be asked to leave.

Step 4: If the offending behaviour is repeated, the volunteer will be asked to leave.

In the case of serious misconduct (for example violence or theft) the volunteer may be suspended immediately while an investigation takes place. The investigation will be carried out by the volunteer's supervisor and \_\_\_\_\_ ( a senior person in the organisation) A decision will be made within \_\_\_ days and the volunteer informed of the decision (state how they will be informed). If the complaint is upheld, the volunteer will be asked to leave.

Volunteers will have the right:

- To be accompanied at meetings at any stage by a friend, volunteer or staff member of their choice.
- To appeal against any decision made. The appeal should be made in writing to \_\_\_\_\_ (a senior person such as the chief executive or chair) and the volunteer will have the opportunity to put their case in person to them. A decision will be made within \_\_\_ days and this decision will be final.

## SAYING GOODBYE...

Volunteers leave for many reasons – because of changes in their personal circumstances, caring responsibilities, to take a paid job, because they move house or leave the area, or just because they want to pursue other interests or priorities. Of course, others may leave because they are bored or de-motivated or unhappy with their experience.

Do you know why volunteers leave your organisation?

It's a good idea to have an 'exit strategy' for volunteers, both those who have just dropped out and those who given you notice that they will be leaving.

This helps the volunteer to:

- Feel able to move on without feeling guilty
- Be thanked in some way for the contribution they have made
- Know that they will be made welcome if they want to return later on
- Have the opportunity to tell you why they are leaving and give any comments or suggestions

You could do this with a phone call, or by having an exit interview, or by sending a letter and feedback form.

Volunteers reasons for leaving – and suggestions that they make – should be recorded somewhere, and evaluated at regular intervals, so that you can note any recurring themes and make sure they feed in to future plans or developments.