

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS



1. Drawing up a Volunteer Policy

What is a volunteer policy?

A volunteer policy is a framework for a volunteer programme. It enables people to look at the benefits and challenges that come with working with volunteers and clarifies their role within the organisation and how they can expect to be treated. It brings together the various policies and procedures that affect volunteers – recruitment, expenses, health and safety and so on.

Why have one?

Commitment – a volunteer policy demonstrates an organisation's commitment to its volunteer programme and its individual volunteers. It shows that care and thought has gone into the volunteer programme.

Consistency – volunteers are a diverse range of people. Being able to refer to a written policy ensures that decisions are consistent and not made on an ad hoc basis, and that all volunteers are treated fairly and equally.

Clarity – a policy allows volunteers to know where they stand; it offers some security, in that they know how they can expect to be treated, and where they can turn to if they feel that things are going wrong.

Unity – it also helps ensure that paid staff, senior management and trustees fully understand why volunteers are involved, and what role they have within the organisation.

Using volunteers for the first time – if your organisation has not yet started to work with volunteers, a policy is the ideal starting point to consider exactly how you will involve them in your work, as it encompasses everything from recruitment to supervision and dealing with any problems that arise.

How do we draw up a volunteer policy?

First step – think about exactly why you are involving volunteers and how they fit into the day-to-day work of the organisation.

Consult – it is important to consult as widely as possible when drawing up the policy. The more input you have, the more relevant the policy is likely to be – and the more ownership people will feel of it:

- *Volunteers* will feel some ownership of the policy if it becomes less of an imposed document.
- *Paid staff* will be able to clarify the role of volunteers in the organisation and allay their concerns about using volunteers.
- *Senior management* and board involvement will ensure that the document is taken seriously within the organisation.

Steering group/review – it may be helpful to have a representative steering group to draw up the policy and regularly review it. The point of the policy is that it should reflect the needs of the organisation. Otherwise it will be ignored.

What should the volunteer policy focus on?

Your needs – there is no blueprint for volunteer policies. Every organisation has its own unique needs that should be reflected in its policy. An organisation that works with volunteers befriending people with learning disabilities is going to have a different policy to that of an organisation carrying out conservation work.

Keep it short – most organisations have a relatively short policy that refers to other separate policies such as health and safety. One way is to view it as a statement of intent, with the day-to-day issues covered in separate policies or a volunteer handbook.

What should the policy cover?

Introduction and statement of principles

Start with an **explanation of what the organisation does**, and why it involves volunteers in its work. This should explain why volunteers are being asked to donate their time, and in what way their efforts are helping the aims of the organisation.

This is the also the place to include a **statement of intent**, setting out the principles guiding the involvement of volunteers, for example that you will not use volunteers to replace paid staff.

Recruitment

Include some information about your recruitment process here – you can always refer people on to other policies. It should briefly cover:

- **advertising for volunteers;**
- **use of application forms;**
- **interview process;**
- **taking up references and CRB checks (if relevant);**
- **dealing with volunteers who aren't right for the role.**

Recruitment procedures are of even greater importance in organisations that work with vulnerable clients.

(These issues are dealt with in Good Practice Guide 2 – Recruiting Volunteers – the process).

Volunteer role outlines

These are similar to job descriptions, helping recruitment and giving volunteers a clear description of the tasks their role involves. Such outlines can then be revised by agreement as part of ongoing supervision of the volunteer.

Induction and training

Include information on the induction and training volunteers can expect. Cover how volunteers are welcomed into the organisation, what information and skills they need and how they can access training.

(Induction for volunteers is covered in section 3 of the Good Practice Guide).

Remember that to avoid the possibility of creating a contract with the volunteers all training should be relevant to their role. For more information on this see HVA Briefing Paper [Legal Status of Volunteers \(Aug 04\) - P012](#) which can be accessed by visiting

www.hastingsvoluntaryaction.org/resources/briefing_papers

You could also identify a trial period, which allows both volunteer and organisation time to assess whether the arrangement is working.

Expenses

Expenses are extremely important to volunteers. Reimbursing what volunteers spend means that anyone can volunteer regardless of income. Stating that you pay expenses such as travel, meals, childcare and so on shows that your organisation values volunteers and is actively making sure that barriers do not exist to volunteer involvement. It is important to be paying out-of-pocket expenses only (i.e. what they actually spent, rather than a flat rate to allow for expenses).

(See GPG? Volunteers and expenses, state benefits and tax).

Supervision and support

Most volunteers should have a named supervisor and regular supervision meetings to discuss any problems or issues that may arise. Stating in your volunteer policy what kind of support volunteers can expect – which will obviously depend on the type of work the volunteers are involved in – offers reassurance to volunteers and staff who may have concerns about who is going to support volunteers. *(See GPG 4 – Supervision and Support)*

Insurance

Volunteers should be insured either under public or employer's liability cover. Including a sentence about how volunteers are covered is an easy way of making sure everyone who comes into contact with your organisation can see that volunteers are covered.

Equal opportunities and diversity

A diverse group of volunteers makes your organisation more welcoming to, and more representative of the local community. Having people from different backgrounds, ages, cultures, genders and outlooks helps throw up new ideas and fresh approaches.

While volunteers are generally not covered by equal opportunities legislation, it is clearly good practice to include them in your equal opportunities policy. Restating your commitment by offering equal opportunity to volunteers from different backgrounds within your volunteer policy shows you take the issue seriously and hopefully means that all other policies have been written with inclusivity in mind.

Health and safety

Organisations have a duty of care to avoid exposing their volunteers to risks to their health and safety. Your organisation should have a health and safety policy in place with volunteers being made aware of the policy and practical safety issues as part of their induction. Including basic information about it in

your volunteer policy is a good way of reminding people and signposting them to the health and safety policy itself.

Grievance and disciplinary procedures

There should be clear procedures in place to deal with complaints by or about volunteers. It is preferable to have separate procedures from those for paid staff, both to ensure that they are understandable and user friendly as possible, and to keep some distinction between staff and volunteers. It may be preferable to call it something other than a 'Discipline and Grievance' policy – a 'Problem Solving Procedure' might be less intimidating and more accurate.

Confidentiality

Volunteers should be bound by the same requirements for confidentiality as paid staff. Including information about this in your policy may allay some potential fears among staff or people working with your organisation about volunteers being unprofessional.

Introducing the Volunteer Policy

Once the policy is written you have to ensure that it is **read, understood and implemented properly** as part of the everyday life of your organisation.

Introducing the policy with a meeting gives a chance to talk people through the policy and explain its importance.

All staff and volunteers should **receive a copy**, even employees who will not be supervising or working alongside volunteers. All inductions, for both staff and volunteers should include discussion of the policy and a copy should be given to the new person.

Display a copy of the policy on **noticeboards** – you could advertise the policy internally – make up posters with key phrases from the policy and pictures of volunteers

The policy can also be the basis of the **information given to the people you work with** about why you involve volunteers. Sometimes people can be worried about accessing services involving volunteers and can feel that volunteers are amateur or untrained.

Accessibility

Clear English – the policy should be written in clear English. Volunteer policies are meant to be guidelines that everybody is aware of. If they are unnecessarily complicated or difficult to understand they will not be followed.

Identifying needs – discussing the policy with volunteers at induction helps identify needs; volunteers with English as a second language or a learning disability may require some parts of the policy to be clarified. It may be appropriate to provide translations.

Format – the policy should be clearly readable by people with sight problems. A sans serif font such as Arial is easier to read. Use a minimum size of 12 point type – RNIB recommends 14 point. Black text on a white or yellow background without columns or boxes is easier to read. Bullet points can be a clear and easily readable way to emphasise certain parts of the policy.

Revising the policy

The flexible nature of volunteering means circumstances can change much more quickly than with paid staff so it makes sense to review the policy regularly to adapt or improve it. As when writing the policy, input from staff and volunteers will help in evaluating its relevance and usefulness – even if very little is revised, the act of looking through it reminds people of what it says and underlines its importance within the organisation.

Appendices

The following are examples of existing volunteer policies. It is recommended that you do not adopt another organisation's policy wholesale but amend/develop one that meets your organisation's particular needs and circumstances.

- i) **Hastings Voluntary Action** – a general policy for occasional and ad hoc volunteers
- ii) **East Sussex Advocacy Service** – a more comprehensive policy for a organisation that relies on volunteers to provide its service



HASTINGS VOLUNTARY ACTION

Volunteer Policy

1. Introduction

HVA exists to enhance the quality of life of people in Hastings and St. Leonards by promoting the principle and practice of voluntary action by individuals and organised groups, and by developing projects that meet community needs.

In line with these objectives, HVA seeks to involve volunteers to:

- increase the capacity of HVA to respond to the needs of our clients and members,
- provide new skills and perspectives,
- increase our contact with the community we serve.

2. Principles

The Volunteer Policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- HVA will ensure that volunteers are properly integrated into the organisation
- HVA does not aim to introduce volunteers to replace paid staff
- HVA expects that staff at all levels will work positively with volunteers

3. Good Practice Guidelines

The following guidelines deal with the practical aspects of the involvement of volunteers. More detailed information, including copies of the documents referred to are included in the Volunteers Handbook.

Recruitment

All prospective volunteers will be interviewed to find out what they would like to do, their skills, suitability and how best their potential might be realised.

Volunteer Agreements

Each volunteer will be provided with a Volunteer Agreement establishing what HVA undertakes to provide. In addition they will agree a written outline of the specific work they will be undertaking.

Expenses

All volunteer expenses as identified in the Volunteer Agreement will be reimbursed on production of receipts or other proof of expenditure.

Induction and Training

All volunteers will receive an induction to HVA and their own area of work. Training will be provided as appropriate.

Support

Volunteers will have a named person as their main contact. They will be provided with regular supervision to feed back on progress, discuss future developments and air any problems.

Insurance

All volunteers are covered by HVA's insurance policy whilst on the premises or engaged in work on HVA's behalf.

Health and Safety

Volunteers are covered by HVA's Health and Safety Policy, a copy of which is in the Volunteers Handbook.

Equal Opportunities

HVA operates an equal opportunities policy in respect of both paid staff and volunteers. A copy is in the Volunteers Handbook.

Confidentiality

Volunteers will be bound by the same requirements of confidentiality as paid staff.



HASTINGS VOLUNTARY ACTION Volunteer Agreement

HVA exists to enhance the quality of life of people in Hastings and St. Leonards by promoting the principle and practice of voluntary action by individuals and organised groups, and by developing projects that meet community needs.

In line with these objectives, HVA seeks to involve volunteers to:

- increase the capacity of HVA to respond to the needs of our clients and members,
- provide new skills and perspectives,
- increase our contact with the community we serve.

This Volunteer Agreement describes the arrangement between Hastings Voluntary Action and you. We wish to assure you of our appreciation of your volunteering with us and will do the best we can to make your volunteering experience with us enjoyable and rewarding.

Part 1: The organisation

Your role as a volunteer is

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and commences/d on

HVA commits to the following:

1. Induction and Training
 - to provide thorough induction to the work of HVA, its staff, your volunteering role and the induction and/or training you need to meet the responsibilities of this role;
 - to provide a clear idea of the tasks you will be asked to perform and of the responsibilities which go with these tasks;
2. Supervision and Support
 - to explain the standards we expect for our services and to encourage and support you to achieve and maintain them;
 - to provide a name person who will meet with you regularly to discuss your volunteering successes and problems;

3. Expenses

to repay your approved out of pocket expenses as quickly as possible; these expenses will include:

- travel to and from home to HVA and during your work
- meal allowance (to be eligible you must work around meal times or at least 4 hours a day)
- cost of crèche, childminding fees or other dependant costs incurred to be available for volunteering at the discretion of the HVA Director

only actual expenses will be reimbursed on production of receipts

3. Health and Safety

to provide adequate training and feedback in support of our health and safety policy, a copy of which will be provided;

4. Insurance

to provide adequate insurance cover for volunteers whilst undertaking voluntary work approved and authorised by us;

5. Equal Opportunities

to ensure that all volunteers are dealt with in accordance with HVA's equal opportunities policy;

6. Problems

to try to resolve fairly any problems, grievances and difficulties you may have while you volunteer with us.

Part 2: **The Volunteer**

I, (volunteer's name) undertake

- to perform my volunteering role to the best of my ability;
- to follow HVA's policies, procedures and standards, including health and safety and equal opportunities, in relation to its staff, volunteers and clients;
- to comply with HVA's confidentiality policy;
- to meet time commitments and standards as agreed to, and to give reasonable notice so that other arrangements can be made.

This agreement is binding in honour only, is not intended to be a legally binding contract between us and may be cancelled at any time at the discretion of either party. Neither of us intend any employment relation to be created either now or any time in the future.

Appendix ii)



East Sussex Advocacy Scheme (E.S.A.S)

Volunteer Policy

Mission Statement

East Sussex Advocacy Scheme's vision is for everyone with a learning disability to have equal rights to choice, opportunity and respect, with the support they need.

What is E.S.A.S.?



East Sussex Advocacy Scheme offers a variety of advocacy to enable people with a learning disability to make informed choices, express their views and access their rights. The scheme is made up of a small team: County Manager, Volunteer Co-ordinator, Advocates and Volunteer Advocates.

The role of an Advocate.

The Advocates work on a one to one basis and with groups of people. Typically, they work with someone on a one to one basis to support them during a change in their life, where there is an identified issue and a point of closure. Advocates also work with East Sussex County Council in ensuring people who access their services are happy with proposed changes and have an opportunity to influence it in relation to the white paper, Valuing People. This is generally done as group work, where people have a chance to talk about issues to someone who is independent of the council. Advocates also support self-advocacy groups.

The role of a Volunteer Advocate.

Volunteer Advocates may have individual partnerships on a long or short term basis. A long term partnership focuses on supporting someone where it is difficult to identify their choices and the emphasis is identifying someone's preferences by knowing them well and speaking up for them. A short term partnership is supporting someone during a life change where there is a specific issue that people are asking for help with. We match people together very carefully dependent upon the advocacy issue. Volunteers advocate for someone from their local community. Volunteers may also be involved in supporting self-advocacy groups.

Values of East Sussex Advocacy Scheme (E.S.A.S.)

E.S.A.S. are committed to the following:

- E.S.A.S will not introduce volunteers to replace paid staff.
- For volunteers to have a defined place in the structure of the organisation.
- For volunteers to be integrated and treated equally as part of the team.
- To recognise the individual skills each person brings to the organisation.
- For volunteers to feel supported and valued in their role through a comprehensive induction to advocacy and Siobhan as a point of contact.
- Encouraging volunteers to develop and build on existing skills and knowledge through sharing good practice within East Sussex Advocacy Scheme and training.

East Sussex Advocacy Scheme (E.S.A.S.)

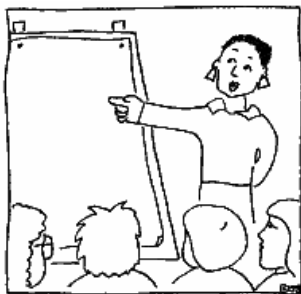
Good Practice.

Recruitment



- E.S.A.S. seeks to recruit volunteers from a diverse range of backgrounds that reflects the makeup of the local community (see diversity policy).
- Before recruiting E.S.A.S. will consider and take advice on how to attract people from a diverse range of backgrounds to the organisation.
- Each potential volunteer will be invited for a meeting and have an application form.
- Each person who volunteers for E.S.A.S. will be asked for references.
- Each person who volunteers for E.S.A.S. and works with vulnerable adults will have a CRB check. This check will need to be carried out before an advocate begins work. CRB check is a police check to see if you have committed an offence that would restrict you from working with vulnerable adults. However, if you have a criminal record this does not necessarily stop you from volunteering for the scheme.

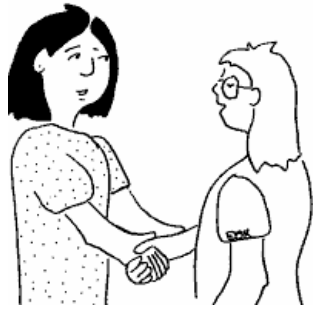
Induction and Training



- Each volunteer will receive information about health and safety and equal opportunities.
- Each volunteer will receive basic training about advocacy before they enter into advocacy partnerships.
- Siobhan will discuss with the volunteer advocate about any other training needs in supervision.
- Each volunteer will act as a volunteer advocate on a trial basis of three months to ensure both E.S.A.S. and each volunteer is happy with the role.
- Volunteers will be paired with a partner who the Co-ordinator thinks is a good match. The volunteer and partner will meet regularly over a one month period to determine whether the partnership is working well.

- Volunteers will have a **volunteer agreement** and **role outline** which shows the expectations and support offered by the scheme. This is not a contract.

Support



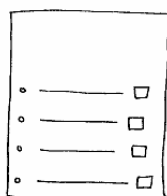
- The Co-ordinator will be a main point of contact at East Sussex Advocacy Scheme.
- Volunteers will have supervision on a one to one basis every four to eight weeks.
- Volunteers will be invited to team meetings to get together with the other advocates and listen to guest speakers.
- The Co-ordinator can be contacted Monday to Friday within working hours (generally 9-5) for support.
- Volunteers can call in to the Eastbourne office to discuss any issues, but it is advisable to phone first.
- Volunteers will be offered a variety of training to meet the individual needs of the person they are advocating for.

Expenses



- All volunteers will have their travel and other agreed expenses reimbursed. Volunteers working a minimum of five hours per day will be able to claim expenses for lunch (see expense guidelines for further information)

Insurance



- All volunteers are covered by Mencap's insurance policy whilst they are on the premises or engaged in work as a volunteer advocate (see volunteer agreement). It is the responsibility of the volunteers to inform their motor insurance company that they are using their car in the act of volunteering.

Health and Safety



- Each volunteer will have a health and safety booklet.
- Each volunteer will undertake basic health and safety training
- Volunteers will be aware of general health and safety and personal safety.
- Volunteers will know how to report an accident or incident that they or their partners have.
- Volunteers will have some knowledge of risk assessment.
(See Health and Safety manual kept at the Eastbourne office, for more information)

Diversity



- Volunteers will be expected to have an understanding and commitment to equal opportunities and diversity.(See diversity policy)

Problem-solving



- East Sussex Advocacy Scheme will try to solve any problems at the earliest possible stage.
- Partners are able to complain about paid staff, volunteers or the service.
- Services are able to complain about paid staff, volunteers or the service.
(See problem-solving and grievance flowcharts for procedure)

Confidentiality



- Volunteers are bound by the same requirements for confidentiality as paid staff (see confidentiality policy).
- At the start of a partnership between an advocate and partner the confidentiality booklet is introduced. This booklet explains the agreement to abide by the rules of confidentiality which each person can sign.

For more information on anything mentioned in the Volunteer Policy, refer to the handbook or volunteer procedures manual.