

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS



4. Supporting and Supervising Volunteers

Support

How can we best support our volunteers?

This depends on the particular situation. Ideally there should be a named person for the volunteer to go to with any questions or queries.

Supporting volunteers means making sure there is always someone around for them, even if only on the end of the phone. If it is not always possible for there always to be a member of staff on hand, think about pairing volunteers with a buddy who they can go to talk about their work.

A group of volunteers may benefit from forming a **volunteer support group**. Problems and ideas that they feel embarrassed to raise individually may be voiced if they have the strength of a support group behind them. You could give a couple of volunteers extra training to run the group so that they provide a space exclusively for volunteers.

Peer support is also useful. This could be through a **buddying** system, where volunteers are matched up with a buddy – an experienced volunteer who is willing to take a particular interest in the individual new volunteer. As well as providing support for new volunteers, a buddying system is a good way of recognising the expertise of experienced volunteers.

Volunteer meetings can also be useful and provide a forum for volunteers collectively to have input into the work and daily life of an organisation. They also give volunteers a chance to share experiences.

What about volunteers with extra support needs?

Some groups of people with extra support needs can be excluded from volunteering, which is a loss both to the organisation and the individual. These can include people with mental health problems, people recovering from drug and alcohol abuse and people with learning disabilities, as well as people with no confidence.

This can be a difficult area, especially when individuals need a great deal of support. Everyone should be treated as an individual so support needs should not be assumed. The volunteer is the best person to know about their own level of support. If there are other parties involved, such as referral agencies or support workers, then they should be consulted too.

However it is important that organisations be realistic about the levels of support they provide. Although a commitment to diversity should be welcomed – more harm than good can come from involving a person whose needs cannot be met - both for the organisation and the individual.

How can we show how much we appreciate our volunteers?

Showing your appreciation of what volunteers do is an essential part of providing support. This can be as simple as saying thank you to them at the end of the day or as big as entering them for one of the major volunteer awards. Remember to include volunteers in your annual report and invite them to your AGM.

How can we make sure volunteers really feel part of our organisation?

A lot of support happens completely informally as part of everyday activities. Take the time to talk to your volunteers about what they did for lunch or what they did last night. Getting to know your volunteers, finding out what is important to them and what makes them tick is invaluable to a good working relationship. Make sure the volunteers have the opportunity to mix socially as this will help to make them feel that the organisation is really part of their lives. However, when you are organising socials, make an effort to arrange different things so that everyone can get involved. Some people may not feel comfortable going to the pub, whilst others may have caring or family responsibilities that restrict their availability. On the other hand, if someone really doesn't want to come to volunteer socials then they don't have to!

Supervision

How closely should we supervise volunteers?

Regular supervision is very important. If a volunteer appears to be doing fine it is tempting to leave them be, but this is dangerous as it means that neither the volunteer nor the volunteer co-ordinator is in the habit of discussing the volunteer's work. If a problem arises on either side it becomes much harder to tackle. Some volunteers need a lot of help and support from their organisation, perhaps due to a disability or mental health problem. Don't prejudge what support someone might need – ask them. Some people may need a little extra training or on the job coaching. Others may lack confidence, and need reassurance that they are doing things correctly.

What benefits does regular supervision bring?

Regular supervision gives you the chance to ask the following questions:

- Is the volunteer enjoying their role?
- Does the volunteer need extra support?
- Would they like to expand or change what they are doing?
- Would they like more training?
- Are they getting on well with staff, clients and other volunteers?

Regular supervision also shows the volunteer that their work and development is important to the organisation.

What form should the volunteer supervision take?

Methods of supervision vary from very informal debriefing chats at the end of the day to regular formal supervision sessions. Whichever you use will depend on the volunteer and what they are doing. However, the basic

principle is the same. Formal or informal supervision time is time you give exclusively to the volunteer with no other distractions – to discuss how you both feel about the work they are doing. Avoid supervision time being seen as appraisal. Many people will have the idea that they are being grilled by ‘the boss’ – reassure them that you are just giving them a chance to talk and that it’s as much about listening to the volunteer as you talking to them.

Encourage volunteers to raise **problems or concerns**. It’s much easier to deal with a problem at an earlier stage than let it grow into something which disrupts the work of the volunteer or even the whole volunteering programme.

Give clear feedback. Make sure that you let the volunteers know when you are pleased with their work. It is important that neither the volunteer nor the supervisor gets into the habit of viewing the meetings as gripe sessions.

Where there are **problems concerning the volunteer’s work or behaviour**, don’t be afraid to raise them. Always remember that the problem is the behaviour not the person, looking at what steps you need to take together to improve things.

Can informal supervision be as effective as formal supervision?

Informal sessions are fine as long as you make sure that they are happening regularly, that you are discussing the volunteer’s work and that they are private enough for the volunteer to feel comfortable raising problems. It can be useful to take the volunteer outside their normal workspace, either to a private room or to a café. This signals to the volunteer that during that time you are there for them and it also ensures that you are not distracted.

What if supervision sessions aren’t feasible?

If regular supervision meetings aren’t appropriate for your volunteers, consider other ways of giving and receiving feedback. It can be useful to have informal catch-ups, to ring round home-based volunteers, or chat with volunteers on one-day projects to make sure they are happy with what they are doing.

What should we try to find out in supervision sessions?

Whether you are supervising formally or informally you need to cover the same types of questions. Things you may want to ask are:

- How are you finding your work at the moment?
- What do you enjoy?
- What don’t you enjoy?
- Is there anything we could be doing differently to make your role easier?
- Is there any training you feel you need?
- Can you see any other areas of work in the organisation that you would like to try?

This is also the time to praise the volunteer for anything they have done well and bring up any problems. It is best to bring up any concerns as early as possible. Too often organisations let small things go and then find they have problems if the situation gets worse.

If volunteer managers leave issues until they are too serious to ignore, the volunteer may be rightfully aggrieved that the problem wasn't mentioned before. Getting into a regular pattern of supervision and developing a relationship where both parties feel able to raise concerns creates an atmosphere in which people are open to feedback and can use it to learn and expand in their role.

Should we keep records of supervision sessions?

Yes. These are useful for you but would be invaluable for someone taking over your role. In line with the Data Protection Act you should let the volunteer know what kind of notes you are keeping. It is a good idea for them to have a copy as well, as it gives them a record of how well they are progressing within the organisation.

Do we have to keep everything we write down about volunteers?

Copies of supervision notes should be stored in a secure place for no longer than is necessary. How long you keep them will vary on your organisation and the volunteer's role. When you do throw them out they should be shredded or completely destroyed.

Appendix

The attached are examples of the kind of records that might be kept of volunteer support and supervision session. Remember that it is important to create records that are appropriate to your own organisation's particular needs.

Appendix i)

SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION SESSION RECORD

Name of volunteer Date

Name of manager/supervisor

Management Issues:

Support Issues:

Development Issues:

Actions Required:
What

By whom

By when

Signatures

Appendix ii)

REVIEW FORM FOR VOLUNTEERS

Name
Area of work

Please note, this questionnaire will be carried out on an annual basis in future and forms part of the requirements of the National Care Standards Commission Inspection process.
Thank you for your participation.

1. Are you satisfied with what you are doing and where you are working?

2. What do you enjoy/not enjoy about your work?

3. For those who work with patients i.e. Ward, Day Care, St. Augustine's and H@H
 - a. How would you describe your relationship with patients?

 - b. Are you happy with the amount of involvement you have with the patients?

4. Are you happy with the amount of time you are giving to St. Michael's Hospice?

5. Have you found any areas of your work difficult?

6. Do you have any other skills which are not being used that you would like to use?

7. Any other comments?

Signed Date.....
(Volunteer)

Confidential; this form will only be seen by the V.S.C. and will be stored in your personal file in the V.S.C.'s office.