

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS



## 3. Induction for Volunteers

### **Why is it important?**

When you take on a volunteer it is important to remember that for the first few weeks they are with you, they will still be making up their minds about whether they want to stay. If their induction is properly planned and implemented it is likely that volunteers will be more motivated and committed. Of course the induction period should also give the volunteer manager the opportunity to assess the volunteer. To make this process easier it can be a good idea to introduce the induction as a trial period at the end of which the volunteer and manager can both discuss how the volunteer feels about what they are doing, what kind of support they need, areas where they need training and which elements of the volunteer role interest them most, and ultimately to decide whether it is right for them and vice versa.

### **Before the volunteer starts**

You can help volunteers feel welcome and involved by sending/giving information about the organisation before they start. For example:-

- leaflet or similar about the organisation and what it does
- volunteer role description (if appropriate)
- contact details and/or direction of how to get there

### **How do we start the process?**

Talk to the volunteer on their first day about what you hope to cover in their induction period. People are very nervous when they start a new volunteer role, just as they would be when starting a job. Try explaining exactly what they will be doing over the first few weeks – by letting them know what to expect you are more likely to put them at their ease. An induction checklist helps both you and the volunteer know what has and hasn't been covered. (A comprehensive Induction Checklist based on one produced by Volunteer Solutions<sup>1</sup> is appended to this Briefing Paper.)

### **What should we cover on the first day?**

- Introduce volunteer to other staff and volunteers
- Show them round the building, including where they can put their things, where toilets are, where they can make a drink etc.
- Explain who to go to if they have any questions or problems
- Show them where they will be working and where they can find any equipment they need

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteer Solutions - 19 Marling Way, Gravesend, Kent DA12 4DW  
01474 358281 [info@volunteersolutions.org.uk](mailto:info@volunteersolutions.org.uk)

- Let them know about breaks: can they take one at any time they want or do you have set times? Tell them where to go locally if they need to get out and where they can buy food
- Let them know what happens at the end of the day (or end of their volunteering stint: do they need to let someone know they are going home?
- Explain how to claim expenses
- Explain about your organisation's policy on volunteers using phones/internet for their own use

The informal things are important in the first instance, as they help the volunteer feel comfortable; practical things like knowing where the toilet is and where they can make a cup of coffee can help alleviate awkwardness. Things like policies and procedures may seem more important but in some ways are better left until the volunteer has had all their practical questions answered and feels more relaxed.

Volunteers find it useful to know what the organisation's goals are, how it goes about achieving them, and where they fit in.

You might give them information on:

- background and history of the organisation
- your mission statement
- the services you provide and client group

Talks from other members of staff and established volunteers can be useful too.

### **How can we make sure volunteers understand policies and other formal matters?**

Important policies and procedures and other formal matters need to be talked about with the volunteer early on. It may be tempting just to hand over a file of policies, but by going through them you can help to make sure that the volunteer understands them and is comfortable with them. It also helps for anyone with limited literacy or English who might otherwise be too embarrassed to ask for help.

Formal matters you need to explain might include:

- Health and Safety: physically show people where the fire exits, fire extinguishers, first aid kit etc. are, as well as pointing out any potential hazards
- Volunteer agreement: this should outline what the volunteer can expect from you and what you expect in return, including issues like how you will train and supervise them, what times you expect them to come in, and what they should do if they can't come in etc.
- Policies: what policies you have depends on your organisation but you will probably want to cover equal opportunities, confidentiality and disciplinary and grievance.

The volunteer needs to take on a lot of information both formal and informal, so you need to let them know who to approach if they have any questions and where they can find copies of policies etc.

### **Do we need a volunteer handbook?**

Many organisations find it useful to have a volunteer handbook with all the information a volunteer needs. Don't make it too large as that can put volunteers off, but cover all the basic information, simply and clearly. If you are only involving a small number of volunteers, infrequently then a handbook may not be such a priority. However, the more volunteers you have, and the greater the distance between volunteers and supervisors, the more important a handbook becomes.

### **What should be in a volunteer handbook?**

This depends on your organisation. Put yourself in the position of a volunteer. What information would you like to feel part of the organisation? Ask current volunteers what they would like to have seen written down when they first joined. A suggested contents list includes:

- Background information on your organisation
- What the organisation does and why – role of management committee
- Day to day life in the organisation – tea and coffee making arrangements, where to leave bicycles and personal possessions, how people communicate in the organisation e.g. pigeonholes, staff meetings, volunteer meetings etc.
- Out of pocket expenses – what is reasonable, how to claim, receipts etc.
- Practical health and safety information: - fire exits and assembly points, who are the first aid officers and where the first aid box is located.
- Policies and procedures relevant to volunteers are best placed in an appendix. Having them in the main text is likely to make the handbook heavy going.
- Accessibility – it is important to ensure that it is accessible and readable.

### **What else do we need to cover in the induction period?**

The rest of the induction period will probably be taken up with training and the volunteer trying out the type of work they will be doing.

Obviously a lot will depend on resources available but if you work closely with the volunteer you should be able to gain a much better picture of how they work, what interests them, what support they need and what they are hoping to get out of volunteering.

Even if there isn't a formal trial period, it would be worthwhile sitting down with volunteers after a few weeks to talk through the induction, how things are going and whether things are still unclear etc.

Whatever the size of the organisation, or however many volunteers you have, it is worthwhile giving attention to the induction process, as volunteers who feel more informed and supported during the first part of their volunteering experience are far more likely to stay and be committed to what they are doing.

If you have taken on several volunteers in a reasonably short space of time it may be worthwhile running a session at the end of the induction period to find out how well, and how much, volunteers have taken on board. 'How well do you know your organisation?' is a three hour training session produced by 'Volunteer Solutions' (see previous footnote) which can be run in house. The aims and objectives of the session are as follows:

By the end of this session participants will have:

- an understanding of the aims and objectives of the organisation
- knowledge of how it is funded, staffed and managed
- discussed the type of client the organisation supports, their circumstances and their expectations
- defined their role and the skills and abilities they will need to carry out that role
- identified the benefits of their participation to the organisation, the client and to themselves as volunteers
- information about the paperwork involved and the procedures that will effect them as volunteers

The training pack is available to be borrowed from the Volunteer Centre, or Rose Austen, the Volunteer Centre Organiser is happy to jointly run the session in house.

Contact –



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## Appendix - Volunteer Induction Checklist

This checklist consists of a number of questions about the information that should be covered with or provided to new volunteers. Not all will be relevant so it would be a good idea to extract the relevant ones to form a checklist tailored to the needs and requirements of your organisation.

- Are volunteers required to sign a Volunteers' Agreement?
- Do volunteers have an outline of the work they will be doing?
- Is there a written Role Description for volunteers?
- Is there a probationary period? If so, how long?
- Do volunteers have regular supervision and reviews to discuss progress and air any problems?
- Are volunteers encouraged to have a voice within the organisation? Is there a process by which they do this? What is it?
- Are there clear guidelines about what expenses can be claimed and the procedure for claiming?
- Are volunteers covered by the organisation's insurance and are there any special conditions or exclusions?
- If a volunteer has a complaint or grievance, is it clear who they should take it to?
- What is the process for dealing with complaints about volunteers?
- Do volunteers have to wear identification?
- What is the process for keeping a record of work carried out or details of contact with clients?
- What methods of support are in place (meetings, telephone call etc)
- Are there emergency contact numbers available?
- If a volunteer experiences an emergency while working off site what should they do?
- What method does the organisation use to keep volunteers informed of changes, news or forthcoming events?
- Can any of the work or training volunteers do with this organisation be accredited?
- Are volunteers with this organisation offered extra training? If so, how is the need for training identified?
- Is there a process for assessing any risk to volunteers and/clients? If so who is responsible for assessing that risk?