

Volunteer Practice Guidance Note

Supporting Your Volunteers

Why is support important?

Support can take many forms, but all volunteers need support throughout their volunteering. Deciding how, where and when to support volunteer will depend on individual support needs and the nature of their role. A starting point to think about is why is support important?

- It helps the volunteer to carry out their role to the best of their ability.
- The volunteers can understand more about the culture and ethos of the organisation or group.
- It helps motivate and enthuse volunteers.
- It stops volunteers from feeling isolated, or even exploited, in their role.
- It helps volunteers cope with the demands of the role.
- It shows the volunteer that the organisation values them.
- If volunteers feel supported they are more likely to be committed and satisfied with their experience. They may choose to volunteer with you for longer, return in the future or encourage others to help out too.

What should I consider when planning support for volunteers?

Different volunteers need different levels of support, it is important that all have equal access to support, whether they use it or not.

You don't have to include everything, but it is a good idea to use some of the points from the approaches below to ensure volunteers are supported:

The personal approach

- Try and get to know your volunteers and make them feel welcome. Sometimes a simple hello, remembering their name or asking how they are getting on can make all the difference.
- Make sure volunteers have a contact person to take any questions, issues or problems to when volunteering. Remember that this contact may change with staff shifts or holidays.
- Spend time alongside your volunteers, to get to know them and their role.
- Stay connected with volunteers. This could be in lots of different ways, for example face to face meetings, a conversation over coffee, by telephone, email, text or letter.
- Keep volunteers up to date with what is going on in the organisation, such as staff changes and future plans, so that they feel part of the team.
- Value their contribution and recognise the contribution they make at an individual and organisational level by saying thank you privately and publicly.
- Individual certificates that celebrate their specific contribution can be awarded.

Group and peer support

- You could have formal or informal group meeting. This could be a 'task meeting' or a 'role meeting' to focus on specific issues, share ideas and generally discuss areas of interest.
- Encourage peer support which involves volunteers supporting each other. This may be in pairs or small groups.
- Consider a mentoring system. An experienced volunteer formally supports a volunteer who is new to the role. This can also offer progression for a more experienced volunteer and allows them to feel valued.
- Celebrations and informal social events where volunteers can have the opportunity to meet other volunteers for example, at Christmas or at the end of a project.

- Encourage volunteers to get to know each other using online networks such as Facebook.
- Invite existing volunteers to talk about their experiences and share their skills at meetings.

Support through training and learning

- A good induction and relevant training makes sure the volunteers are supported into their volunteer role.
- Ask volunteers what relevant support and training they need for their role and offer this.
- Be clear what training is essential for the role and what's optional.
- Provide ongoing training through out the volunteers volunteer journey.

Support from the organisation

- Provide volunteers with a volunteer handbook. This will include volunteer policies and procedures, such as equality, health and safety and solving difficult situations.
- Make sure volunteer activities are covered by appropriate insurance and have been risk assessed.
- Ensure volunteering is covered by the appropriate resources; staff support, funded correctly, provide materials needed to carry out their role effectively and safely. For example uniform, personal protective equipment and guidance on the safe use of equipment.
- Create a dedicated volunteering section on the organisation's website or intranet.
- Hold a celebration event in Volunteers Week Award.
- Show volunteers any thank you cards from clients.
- Provide refreshments at meetings and training, where possible.
- Make sure that volunteers can, and know how to, claim out of pocket expenses.
- Ensure that volunteers are aware that have the right to have time off and say no.
- Provide volunteers with a reference.

What's next?

You will have to write your policies for managing challenging volunteer situations to suit your organisation or group's situations, but care should be taken to make the process as clear as possible, with everything in writing and definite steps and timescales given for dealing with the issue. It is a good idea to get volunteers and other staff to help you create them.



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