

COUNCIL VOLUNTEER POLICY FRAMEWORK

Volunteer Now has developed this sample council volunteer policy framework for local councils in partnership with a working group of councils from across Northern Ireland. The framework is designed to cover standard volunteer policy information for volunteers involved in supporting Council services, as well as extend to more strategic areas such as council's influence on local volunteering through things such as funding, employer supported volunteering, responding to local emergency situations or procurement for services. The document has been split into two sections to reflect this.

It is recognised by Volunteer Now that the guidelines in the Council Volunteer Policy Framework will be considered in the light of individual council's needs and/or situation. The sample statements (in italics) are provided only as an illustration of the relevant guidelines and are not intended as a standard or model for use by any other organisation. There may be other issues that councils may want to address through its volunteer policy due to the nature of the organisation and particular volunteer roles. Remember the difference between policy and procedure. Policy outlines what you intend to do and procedures then outlines how you will do this. Volunteer Now provides a wide range of materials, including template forms, to support the involvement of volunteers, these are available via our website at www.volunteernow.co.uk

Volunteers Supporting Council Services

Values

Your volunteer policy will need to be based on a clear set of values around the involvement of volunteers. It is a good idea to begin the policy development process by agreeing a Value Statement, based perhaps on your organisation's historical perspective, its wider values and ethos and your reasons for involving volunteers.

1. The policy should value the distinctive contribution that volunteers can make and should acknowledge the role volunteering can play in engaging local people in the work of the Council.

"Anytown Council values the involvement of volunteers in our work because they help reflect the interests, needs and resources of the community we aim to serve and bring a unique perspective on all our work".

2. The policy should recognise volunteering across the council area and recognise the Council's role in celebrating it and creating an environment for it to flourish.

"Anytown Council values volunteering across the community and recognises the important contribution volunteers are making in sport, faith, community development and the many vital services which they deliver. The council will seek to provide a local environment for volunteering which will enable it to grow"

3. The policy should recognise the status of volunteers as a legitimate and complementary resource to that of paid staff.

"Anytown Council recognises volunteers as an important part of our team, with a

distinctive but complementary role alongside paid staff."

4. The policy should acknowledge that volunteering is a beneficial experience for both volunteers and service users.
"Insofar as Anytown Council benefits from the skills, experience and enthusiasm of volunteers, we believe that volunteers should be able to gain personal benefits from the experience. We are committed to managing volunteers in a way that ensures that the needs of both parties are met."
5. You should also include a statement in this section on the organisation's beliefs about quality, equal opportunities, diversity, etc. and how they apply to volunteer involvement.
"Anytown Council strives to create a diverse and inclusive organisation within a diverse and inclusive community. Therefore, we are committed to ensuring equality of access to high quality volunteer opportunities and equality of treatment for our volunteers in all our policies and practices."

Preparation and planning

The next areas that the policy should address are those actions and systems that need to be put in place before the organisation is ready to actually involve volunteers. Even if volunteers are already active in your organisation, it is important to discuss the reasons for involving volunteers with staff, existing volunteers, service users or beneficiaries, Trade Unions etc. and agree on the nature and purpose of the volunteer involvement.

6. The policy should identify the ways in which the work of the organisation can be extended by the involvement of volunteers and ensure that these opportunities complement rather than substitute the work of paid staff. The process of developing new roles should involve consultation with Trade Unions representing staff in Councils.
"Anytown Council identifies roles for volunteers in consultation with Trade Union representatives which extend the work of the organisation. Volunteers are involved at appropriate levels of the organisation in roles which complement, but never substitute, the work of paid staff."
7. Furthermore, the policy should make clear the position of volunteers in any staff dispute or action.
"Volunteers will not be used in times of industrial action to do the work of paid staff. They may continue with their regular tasks, but will not be asked to undertake additional duties."
8. The policy should specify how volunteer roles would be defined, including the purpose of each role and tasks involved.
"All volunteers are provided with a written role description, outlining the purpose, tasks and main expectations of their role. This role is reviewed at least once a year with the volunteer's supervisor."
9. The policy should clarify what protection volunteers can expect from the organisation in terms of insurance.
"Volunteers with Anytown Council are fully protected by the organisation's public liability

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and personal accident insurance. However, drivers using their cars in connection with their voluntary work must inform their own insurance company to ensure adequate and continued cover."

- 10.** The policy should state the organisation's position on the reimbursement of expenses to volunteers including what expenses can be claimed, and how to make a claim.

"Anytown Council reimburses volunteers' out of pocket expenses for travel and subsistence when claims are submitted on a standard Expenses Claim Form and accompanied by proof of expenditure."

- 11.** It is essential that the policy commits the organisation to providing volunteers with adequate resources to do the work for which they were recruited.

"Anytown Council endeavours to provide adequate and appropriate facilities, equipment and resources to enable volunteers to fulfil their roles."

- 12.** The policy should make clear where the responsibility for day-to-day management of volunteers lies, specifying a member, or members, of staff as appropriate and making a clear commitment to providing such staff with appropriate training.

"XXXXXXX is responsible for the overall management of volunteer involvement, including overseeing the implementation of this policy and dealing with any difficult situation relating to volunteers. The volunteer's designated supervisor provides support and supervision, identifies training requirements, countersigns expenses claims etc. All staff required to undertake such duties are provided with training in the management, supervision, support and training of volunteers."

Recruitment and selection

While attracting and selecting volunteers is a different process from staff recruitment, you should still aim to provide a fair, effective and transparent process that is truly inclusive. Although you may wish to keep the procedures fairly informal in practice, it is still vital to lay down minimum requirements clearly in your policy to help ensure that they are consistently implemented.

- 13.** The policy needs to lay down the organisation's approach to volunteer recruitment, stating how volunteer opportunities will be made accessible to all sections of the community.

"Anytown Council is committed to serving and representing all the people of Anytown and wishes to see all sections of the community represented among our volunteers. Volunteer opportunities are widely promoted throughout Anytown, and we will endeavour to make recruitment and selection materials available in a format accessible to any individual or group, upon request. Furthermore, Anytown Council regularly reviews the make-up of the volunteer team to identify and target any under-represented group(s)."

- 14.** The organisation should have an agreed recruitment and selection procedure for all volunteers, which is appropriate to the role and which reflects best practice in relation to equal opportunities. This, should be briefly outlined in the policy.

"Anytown Council implements a fair, effective and open system in the recruitment and selection of volunteers and treats all information collected in this process confidentially."

Depending on role, potential volunteers must complete registration forms, provide references and attend an informal chat / interview. Additional measures may be implemented depending on the nature of the volunteer role and criminal records checks are conducted where appropriate.

*The process is conducted by appropriately briefed/trained staff and aims to allow **both** parties to give and receive sufficient information to assess whether the volunteer opportunities available match the potential volunteer's skills, qualities and needs.*

If unsuccessful, individuals will be offered an opportunity to discuss the outcome and identify possible alternatives outside of Anytown Council ."

Management of volunteers

This section will specify how you intend to manage volunteers once they have become involved in your organisation. Goodwill alone is not enough to guarantee success and a pro-active approach is essential both to achieve the organisation's objectives and to ensure that volunteer needs and motivations are met. Remember the voluntary nature of the relationship between volunteers and the organisation as you develop this section and try to ensure that the policy holds benefits for both parties.

- 15.** The policy should outline how the expectations of both parties are to be agreed and communicated.

"All volunteers are provided with a written letter of welcome, which outlines the expectations and responsibilities of both the volunteer and Anytown Council. This agreement may be reviewed at any time with the consent of the volunteer and his/her supervisor, including during the initial review meeting at the end of the settling in / taster period (see point 16)."

- 16.** Volunteers will need to be properly briefed about the activities to be undertaken, and given all the necessary information to enable them to perform them with confidence. The policy should commit the organisation to an appropriate induction procedure.

"All volunteers are provided with an induction within six weeks of commencing their voluntary work. The induction: provides background information on Anytown Council; explains its structures and procedures; describes the volunteer role and the work team and outlines how s/he will be supported, including practical information on e.g. expenses."

During the induction period volunteers will be provided with written information on relevant legislation, organisational policies and codes of practice and will be given the opportunity to discuss any of the issues with XXXXXX and/or supervisor."

- 17.** A settling in / taster period is helpful in providing an opportunity to assess the suitability/progress of the placement, and allowing any problems to be resolved at an early stage. A policy statement should help ensure consistent implementation of the procedure and reassure new volunteers as to the reasons for such a measure.

"All volunteer placements are subject to a settling in / taster period, the length of which

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depends on the nature and hours of the voluntary work. During this period volunteers are given additional support and a review meeting between the volunteer and his/her supervisor is held at the end of the settling in / taster period to ensure that all parties are satisfied with the arrangement."

- 18.** Access to regular support and supervision is key to maintaining effective and motivated volunteers. While the level of support and supervision needed will vary for different volunteers and different volunteer roles, the policy should commit the organisation to providing each volunteer with a named individual to provide this.

"All volunteers are allocated a named member of staff as their supervisor (although the XXXXXX can also be contacted in case of an emergency or if the designated supervisor is unavailable). This individual can provide day-to-day help and guidance on any issue related to the voluntary work and is responsible for providing regular support to, and supervision of, the volunteer. The frequency, duration and format of this support and supervision is agreed between the volunteer and his/her supervisor at the end of the settling in / taster period."

- 19.** Training will enable volunteers to develop their capabilities and personal competence. The organisation must decide on what basis such training will be offered, and to whom. A clear policy statement will ensure fair and equal access to these opportunities.

"Anytown Council is committed to improving the effectiveness of volunteers. Volunteers may choose to attend any in-house training course that they feel is relevant to their voluntary work, subject to the approval of their supervisors and availability of places. Volunteers may also apply to the XXXXXXX for financial and practical support to attend external courses, where they can be shown to have a clear relevance to the voluntary work. (c/f Training and Development Policy). Volunteers attending approved training courses, internal or external, may do so within their normal hours of voluntary work and may reclaim out-of-pocket expenses."

- 20.** The organisation must make arrangements to deal with any difficulties with the volunteer or their work in a fair, open and effective way. Equally volunteers should have access to an equivalent process to address issues about any aspect of their work or how it is managed. The aim of such a policy is to protect all concerned while maintaining good relationships and effective volunteers where possible.

"Anytown Council aims to reflect the voluntary nature of our relationship with volunteers in all our policies and procedures for managing their involvement. Therefore, the volunteer's designated supervisor deals with minor complaints or grievances about or by volunteers or their work through the usual support and supervision procedures, in the first instance."

However, we recognise our duty to protect the wellbeing and interests of all our stakeholders and therefore operate a formal complaints procedure in the case of more serious complaints. In the case of particularly serious offences, as specified in the Code of Practice, this process may be bypassed and/or the subject of the complaint asked to leave. Where a criminal offence is suspected, the matter will be handed over to the

police."

- 21.** Volunteers should, as far as possible, be fully integrated into the organisation. You may want to include a commitment in your policy to specific communication systems to keep volunteers informed, special measures to recognise and publicise their contributions, opportunities to take part in decision-making etc.

"Anytown Council recognises the important role that volunteers fulfil within the organisation. It endeavours to communicate with volunteers in appropriate ways, including bulletin boards at each site and the monthly 'Volunteer Update' email.

It also recognises the importance of seeking volunteers' ideas and opinions at regular intervals and conducts an annual volunteer survey and provides suggestion boxes at each site. Feedback from volunteers is always welcome and any volunteer may make representations to the monthly meeting of the Management Team."

- 22.** Records should be kept of the work done by volunteers, to enable their involvement to be monitored effectively.

"In order to effectively monitor the work that volunteers do and how they are managed, a personal file is maintained for all volunteers, which includes: contact details and other relevant personal information; details of the application and selection process; agreements made; hours worked; records of support and supervision activities; training undertaken and any complaints or grievances made or received. Some of this information and other relevant information may also be recorded in computerised records. All such information is treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and volunteers are entitled to inspect all such information pertaining to their own involvement."

Providing Strategic Leadership for Volunteering

Employer Supported Volunteering

The policy should consider the opportunities the Council may be able to offer for employer supported volunteering.

"Anytown Council will develop an employer supported volunteering policy which allows staff to volunteer within working hours for a specified period annually, taking into consideration business needs."

This will need to be underpinned by a procedure detailing the process for implementing this policy.

Creating an enabling environment for volunteering

The policy should look at how the Council intends to support volunteering in the local area.

"Anytown Council will review its grants schemes to community organisations to ensure that

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good practice in volunteer involvement is encouraged.”

The policy should consider how the Council will encourage good practice in volunteering when procuring services.

“Anytown Council will ensure that organisations seeking to offer services to the Council in response to tendering processes, demonstrate high standards of volunteer management where volunteers are involved in service delivery.”

Emergency Planning

Councils may wish to draw on the experience of public bodies across the world, which involve volunteers to help recovery for extreme circumstances, for example volunteers in Australia who helped with the community clean up after bush fires or South Dublin County Volunteer Corps (in partnership with the local Council) which responds to events or emergency situations.

“Anytown Council will give consideration to how volunteers could be recruited and trained to support the community in times of extreme crisis e.g. after social unrest, flooding, storm damage etc.”

We would like to thank the following Councils for their support in the development of this Policy

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Newry and Mourne District Council
Omagh District Council
Strabane District Council

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