

VOLUNTEER POLICY FRAMEWORK

This document provides guidelines for areas to be addressed in a volunteer policy. 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. Statements will have to be considered in the light of individual organisation's needs and/or situation and there may be other issues that you may want to address through your volunteer policy due to the nature of your organisation and particular volunteer roles.

Remember the difference between policy and procedure. Policy outlines **what** you intend to do and procedures outline **how** you will do this. Try to keep the policy as concise as possible. At the end of the document you are signposted to a range of additional information sheets and templates that will help you to develop your procedures for involving volunteers, which will be more detailed.

Introduction

At the start of your Volunteer Policy it is helpful to outline the purpose of the policy.

"Anytown Community Project's Volunteer Policy is written to recognise the contribution made by volunteers and to provide a framework for how we will manage volunteers whilst recognising the voluntary nature of our relationship with volunteers."

You should also define volunteering so as everyone is clear who the policy refers to.

"Anytown Community Project defines volunteering as "The commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment or individuals outside, (or in addition to) one's immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice" (Department for Communities, Join in Get Involved, Build a Better Future 2012)."

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.

The policy should value the distinctive contribution that volunteers can make.

"Anytown Community Project values the involvement of volunteers in our work because they help reflect the interests and needs of our community and bring a unique perspective to all our work."

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

"Anytown Community Project recognises volunteers as a core part of our team, with a distinctive but complementary role alongside paid staff."

The policy should acknowledge that volunteering is a beneficial experience for both volunteers and service users.

"Anytown Community Project believes that volunteering should be a mutually beneficial experience whereby we benefit from the skills, experience and enthusiasm of volunteers, and they too 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."

You should also include a statement in this section on the organisation's beliefs about equality and diversity and how they apply to volunteer involvement.

"Anytown Community Project strives to create a diverse and inclusive organisation. 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."

Planning for Volunteer Involvement

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 involve volunteers. This would include ensuring that there is a suitably trained person responsible for the volunteers as well as discussing the reasons for involving volunteers with staff, trustees, service users or beneficiaries, Trade Unions etc. and agree on the nature and purpose of the volunteer involvement.

The policy should identify the ways in which the work of the organisation can be extended by the involvement of volunteers. It should ensure that these opportunities complement rather than substitute the work of paid staff (if applicable) and makes clear the position of volunteers during any staff shortages or disputes.

"Anytown Community Project identifies meaningful roles for volunteers which extend the work of the organisation. Volunteers are involved across the organisation in roles which complement, but never substitute, the work of paid staff. They 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."

The policy should outline how the organisation manages risk.

"A full assessment of potential risk to volunteers is carried out when designing volunteer roles and strategies are put in place to control the risks."

The policy should specify how volunteer roles would be defined, including the purpose, expectations and boundaries of the role and tasks involved.

"All volunteers are provided with a written role description, outlining the purpose, tasks, main expectations and boundaries of their role. This role is reviewed at least once a year with the supervisor."

The policy should clarify what protection volunteers can expect from the organisation in terms of insurance.

"Volunteers with Anytown Community Project are fully protected by the organisation's public liability 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."

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 Community Project reimburses volunteers' out of pocket expenses, e.g. travel, when claims are submitted on a standard Expenses Claim Form and accompanied by proof of expenditure."

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

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.

"The Project Manager is responsible for the overall management of volunteer involvement, including overseeing the implementation of this policy and dealing with any complaint or 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 informal in practice, it is still vital to lay down minimum standards clearly in your policy and ensure that they are consistently implemented. This section should outline the key commitments of your recruitment and selection policy without going into detail of the procedures.

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 Community Project is committed to involving all sections of the community as volunteers and will promote opportunities widely throughout Anytown. We will endeavour to make recruitment and selection materials available in alternative formats upon request and use images and/or descriptions that reflect the diversity of the community. We regularly review the make-up of the volunteer team to identify and target any under-represented group(s)."

The organisation should have an agreed recruitment and selection procedure for all volunteers which is appropriate to the role and which is based on principles of equality and diversity.

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

All potential volunteers will go through a recruitment and selection process that is appropriate to the role offered. Anytown Community Project uses registration forms, references and meets the volunteers face to face for a discussion about their suitability. Additional measures may be implemented depending on the nature of the volunteer role and AccessNI 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 interests.*

There is a procedure for dealing with unsuccessful applications whereby individuals will be offered an opportunity to discuss the outcome and identify possible alternatives within or outside of Anytown Community Project."

Management of volunteers

This section will specify how you intend to manage volunteers once they have become involved in your organisation. Remember the voluntary nature of the relationship between volunteers and the organisation and try to ensure that the policy holds benefits for both parties.

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

"Volunteers are provided with a written letter of welcome, which outlines the expectations and responsibilities of both the volunteer and Anytown Community Project and acknowledges the voluntary nature of the relationship. This agreement may be reviewed at any time with the consent of the volunteer and his/her supervisor, including at the review meeting at the end of the settling in period."

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 before commencing their role and this can continue as required during the settling in period. The induction provides background information on Anytown Community Project, 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 the building, health and safety, confidentiality, claiming expenses and code of behaviour. Access to organisational policies will be outlined and an opportunity given to discuss issues with the Supervisor."

A settling in period is helpful in providing an opportunity to assess the suitability/progress of the volunteering and allowing any problems to be resolved at an early stage.

"Volunteers will be given a settling in period, the length of which depends on the nature and hours of the volunteering. 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 period to ensure that all parties are satisfied with the arrangement." 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 (and an alternative contact for emergencies). This individual can provide day-to-day guidance on any volunteering issue 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 period."

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 Community Project is committed to improving the effectiveness of volunteers. Volunteers are provided with relevant training (some of which will be compulsory) to help them carry out their role safely. They may be offered other training courses run by Anytown Community Project that are relevant to their role, subject to the approval of their supervisors and availability of places. 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."

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 Community Project takes complaints about or by volunteers seriously. A complaints procedure is in place whereby the volunteer supervisor will try to resolve minor complaints or issues about or by volunteers or their work through the usual support and supervision procedures, in the first instance. However, in the case of more serious issues, formal procedures will be followed which will include in the case of particularly serious offences (as specified in the Code of Practice) bypassing the process and/or asking the subject of the complaint to leave. Where a criminal offence is suspected, the matter will be handed over to the police."

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 gain their feedback (even when they leave your organisation) and take part in decision-making etc.

"Anytown Community Project recognises the core role that volunteers fulfil at every level of the organisation. It endeavours to communicate with volunteers in appropriate ways, including bulletin boards, e-mails, social media platforms and a monthly newssheet. 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 (even after they decide to leave) and any volunteer may make representations to the monthly meeting of the Management Committee."

Records should be kept of the work done by volunteers, to enable their involvement to be monitored effectively. It is also helpful to talk to a range of stakeholders to measure impact of what volunteers do and communicate this widely.

"Anytown Community Project recognises that volunteers are having a huge impact on those they work with and on their own lives. We will gather evidence of the amount of work carried out by volunteers and of the difference made by them by gaining feedback from them and those they have engaged with."

Volunteers' personal details must be protected in line with data protection principles.

"All volunteers' details are held in line with data protection regulations."

If relevant, an organisation should make it explicitly clear that intellectual property rights of original work produced by volunteers has been transferred to the organisation, i.e. flyers, photos, reports that volunteers have written in etc.

“Both volunteers and the organisation agree that the intellectual property rights of original work produced by volunteers automatically transfers to the organisation.

The organisation should make it clear how the contribution of volunteers will be recognised across the organisation.

“Opportunities will be sought by Anytown Community Project to recognise the value of volunteers’ contributions and communicate their appreciation to volunteers both formally and informally.”

It is helpful to indicate on the volunteer policy how often it and other volunteer procedures will be reviewed, showing the latest review date for reference.

“This policy and accompanying procedures will be reviewed every three years to ensure that it reflects best practice for volunteering in Anytown Community Project.”

Disclaimer

Reasonable precautions have been taken to ensure information in this publication is accurate. However it is not intended to be legally comprehensive; it is designed to provide guidance in good faith without accepting liability. If relevant, we therefore recommend you take appropriate professional advice before taking any action on the matters covered herein. Charity Registration No. NIC101309. Company Limited by Guarantee No. NI602399. Registered in Northern Ireland. Volunteer Now, Skainos Centre, 239 Newtownards Road, Belfast, BT4 1AF. T: 028 9023 2020 E: info@volunteernow.co.uk W: www.volunteernow.co.uk