Developing a Volunteer Policy

Why develop a volunteer policy?

It is helpful to think about why you need a policy before you start to write one. Consider the following:

1. Does everyone in your organisation understand why volunteers are involved and value their input?
2. Could policy help to clarify roles and expectations and to ensure appropriate behaviour?
3. Are volunteers engaged in activities that may pose some risk to themselves or others? Could policy reduce or eliminate that risk?
4. Could policy enhance the quality of service provided?
5. Are there unwritten beliefs, values or rules that everyone involved in the organisation should know about?

The issues identified will vary for each organisation, but you will probably be able to relate them to one or more of the following benefits of developing a volunteer policy. A policy which sets out how volunteering is promoted and managed within your organisation will:

- Highlight the value of volunteers and contribution they make;
- Make clear to everyone the role of volunteers within your organisation;
- Provide a framework for which procedures or practices in working with volunteers should be developed; and
- Provide a mechanism to establish strategies for the monitoring, review and development of volunteering within your organisation.

How to develop volunteer policy?

1. Recognise that volunteering is important to the organisation.

First, make sure that everyone in the organisation recognises the value and importance of volunteer involvement. It is important that someone takes responsibility for raising the profile of volunteering in the organisation- sending articles, press clippings, Facebook posts, tweets, providing reports to committees, etc.

A good idea is to promote information on the number of volunteer hours contributed, the number of clients supported, or tasks completed, the difference volunteers make to the client's life, etc.

This should help everyone to understand that volunteers deserve attention in order to be involved appropriately. Management committees need to realise that a lack of appropriate policy and procedures can result in mismanagement, which places both the organisation and its management at considerable risk.

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2. Establish the value base

Once everybody in the organisation has recognised that volunteering is important, then a clear value base or values statements about volunteers' involvement are needed.

This links to the initial question- 'Why involve volunteers?' (from An Introduction), and this is the first question every organisation wishing to involve volunteers should ask. This kind of values and belief statement or broad policy statement will provide a context for all other policy statements regarding volunteer involvement.

3. Develop policy statements

Only when the first two steps are in place, can an organisation begin to formulate actual policy statements. There are four key stages of volunteer involvement that could provide the framework for a volunteer policy- see *Volunteer Policy Framework* for some examples of the key policy statements any volunteer involving organisation should consider.

- Values
- Planning for volunteer involvement
- Recruitment and selection
- Management of volunteers

The guidelines under each heading will help you to identify the main issues for consideration but remember you must create statements that are unique for your organisation and your volunteer roles. The framework represents a basic standard for the effective involvement of volunteers, but there may be many other issues that you wish to include. Remember, the difference between policy and procedures though- policy statements are saying **what** you will do**,** NOT **how** you will do it. Try to keep the document reasonably brief and straightforward, so it is easy for people to read and understand.

Policy into Practice

Once you have written your policy, you need to develop the detail behind each statement through the development of procedures, guidelines and standards. This is a lengthy but very important process. It will be vital to monitor how (or if) the policies and procedures are implemented by staff and volunteers, and to attempt to measure their impact on the organisation.

Policies cannot be written in stone- they must be revised and updated **regularly.**

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