

# Information for Groups Working with Volunteers

## Good Practice Guide

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**Volunteer Centre Partnership  
South Gloucestershire**



# **Volunteer Centre**

## **Partnership South Gloucestershire**

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## **Good Practice Information for Groups Working with Volunteers**

### **Introduction**

This booklet has been produced to share good practice with established groups and new groups who are considering recruiting volunteers.

We hope that you will find this information helpful, but we would welcome feedback on how it can be improved. Please contact your local Volunteer Centre for a copy of the Good Practice Guide evaluation form.

Volunteer Centre Yate has produced this booklet; the content is based on an earlier publication by Bristol Volunteer Centre and we gratefully acknowledge their agreement to us producing our own version.

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## **Six elements for starting and running a volunteer scheme**

### **1. Planning**

The needs of the organisation and the needs of the volunteer must be borne in mind as you plan volunteer recruitment.

#### **Checking with Colleagues**

Check with all relevant organisations and people from whom you may need permission and co-operation as part of your initial planning.

Consider everyone that will be involved:

- Management Committee/Trustees
- Staff
- Service Users
- Existing Volunteers

Ensure that volunteers are complementing and not substituting for the work of paid staff. You may need to consult trade unions about this.

#### **Define the Role of the Volunteer**

- Define the role that you would like the volunteer to play within your organisation
- Create a Volunteer Policy for your organisation. Your local Volunteer Centre can assist you with this
- Be clear about why your organisation is involving volunteers and the activities they will support

#### **Job descriptions for volunteers should include:**

- A list of duties, tasks and responsibilities
- A statement on the time and commitment involved
- Identification of the skills needed for the job:  
those skills thought to be necessary and those which are desirable
- The times, days and place of work for the volunteering opportunity
- The name of a person to whom the volunteer will be accountable
- Reference to the person who will provide the volunteer with supervision

#### **Policies**

##### **Other policies to have in place include:**

- Mission Statement: this usually contains the key organisation aims and objectives
- Equalities policy: with particular reference to volunteers
- Recruitment policy: procedures followed in the selection of volunteers
- Confidentiality policy
- Health and Safety policy

#### **Finance**

- Have you budgeted for volunteer expenses?
- Can you meet the training needs of volunteers?
- Has your organisation got adequate insurance?

## **2. Recruiting and Shortlisting**

#### **Recruiting Volunteers:**

- Volunteer Centres offer you a free advertising service in their offices, within newsletters, on their web-sites, social media and via the Do-it National Volunteering Database website.
- Local radio, commercial press, newsletters and social media are effective in reaching potential volunteers
- Advertise for volunteers in various community newsletters to reach the widest audience

#### **Short-listing Volunteers:**

##### **Application Forms:**

- Application forms are useful in preparing for interviews and are a good way of recording information

- Keep application forms as clear and simple as possible
- Where people have to hand-write information, leave plenty of space
- You may be able to offer support in form filling

### **What do volunteers need to know about your organisation?**

It is best to have information in writing for volunteers to consider:

- Who is the contact person and what is his/her role?
- What does your organisation do?
- What does the volunteering role involve?
- Where and when does the volunteering take place?
- What sort of time commitment is required?
- Are working times fixed or flexible to suit the volunteer's needs?
- What skills are needed? Which of the skills are necessary? Which are desirable?
- To whom are volunteers responsible?
- What support is offered and who provides it?
- What are the expenses available? E.g. transport, lunch, childcare
- Are references required?
- Is a Police Check (DBS) required?
- Information on relevant policies?

### **What do you need to know about the volunteer?**

- Name, address, telephone numbers, email address
- What is the volunteer's length of commitment and availability?
- Does the volunteer have any special needs or requirements?
- Are there any possible restrictions? E.g. police record
- Do transport and child-care arrangements effect the volunteer's commitment and availability?
- Has the volunteer any previous experience, relevant skills or interests?
- Does the volunteer have the ability to keep to confidentiality policies?
- Does the volunteer prefer one-to-one or group work?
- Does the volunteer prefer a structured or flexible environment?
- Does the volunteer have the ability to take on responsibility?
- Does the volunteer have the ability to relate to others?

## **3. Interviewing**

### **Planning an interview:**

- Interviews or informal discussions are conversations with a purpose
- Be clear about what you need to know
- Ensure there is a clear arrangement for time and place
- The environment should be comfortable and free from interruptions such as telephones, other personnel and the public if possible
- Allow sufficient time for the interview
- Decide on a formal or informal approach
- Bring relevant information to the interview (application, expense claim form, other documents)
- Decide how you will record the details of the interview

### **Interviewing:**

- Relax
- Introduce yourself and help the interviewee feel as comfortable as possible
- Clarify the purpose of the interview
- Let the interviewee know they can ask for questions to be repeated
- Give some details about the organisation and where volunteers fit in
- Outline any relevant policies
- Summarize the main points at the end of the interview and agree on the next steps: e.g. taking up references, starting date, induction details etc.

### **Do's:**

- DO listen closely to what is said
- DO ask open questions as these gain more information and more honest answers
- DO follow up answers you are unclear about, ask for more details if required

- DO allow the interviewee the chance to ask questions
- DO thank interviewees for their time and interest
- DO be clear about what happens next. If you are unable to give the result of the interview on the day, let the interviewee know your decision as soon as possible.

#### **References and Checks:**

- References are good practice and a useful way of gaining insight into the volunteer's qualities
- It may be appropriate to talk through possible referees with the interviewee
- References should not include close relatives or people under 18
- A reference that indicates a problem does not necessarily mean the volunteer is unsuitable.
- If the volunteer will be working with a vulnerable client group it is advisable to take up a criminal reference check (DBS). Talk this through with the volunteer and point out that very few criminal convictions will exclude them from working with vulnerable people.

#### **After the Interview:**

- Look over your recorded information and make clear evaluations
- Ensure that any decisions you make are based on the needs of the organisation; reflect on your equal opportunities policy and are not based on personal prejudices

#### **For the successful applicant:**

- Make sure their starting arrangements are clear
- Introduce them to other workers at the time of the interview if possible
- Start the volunteer in the job as quickly as possible. If there are any delays, be clear as to why and set a start date

#### **For the unsuccessful applicant:**

- If a person is not suitable give your reasons for not accepting them in a clear, honest and sensitive way
- If appropriate offer an alternative volunteering opportunity
- Give the applicant the chance to discuss the decision you have made
- You may refer interviewees back to your local Volunteer Centre for more volunteering opportunity information

## **4. Volunteer Induction**

Once a volunteer has been recruited it is very important to give them a sense of belonging, make them feel welcome and valued, and to orientate them into your organisation/group. A thorough induction is vital to ensure that a volunteer understands their role and how their work will be of benefit to your group. It should also enable the volunteer to carry out their work safely and effectively.

#### **What to Include?**

The induction should include a variety of information designed to bring the volunteer up to date with policies and procedures, as well as to give them information about your group's activities and where they fit in.

The induction needs to cover essential items such as the structure of the organisation and details should cover important policies such as Health and Safety. You may find the Volunteer Induction Checklist useful when introducing someone to volunteering to ensure that all aspects are covered.

#### **Volunteer Information Pack**

For new volunteers, you could consider producing a simple information pack that includes:

- A copy of their role description – an outline of what is expected of them.
- Their immediate points of contact (this could include people who they are most likely to work with and the group's Volunteer Co-ordinator).
- Contact numbers, e-mail and postal addresses of key people.
- Details of what expenses can be claimed and how to do it.
- An overview of the group – its management structure and possibly a copy of your development plan so they can see how their contribution fits into the overall scheme.

## Helping Volunteers Settle In

- Ensure that each new volunteer has a named person who they can talk to if they are in doubt about anything to do with their new role; this could be someone who has done the job before.
- Introduce them to the people they will come into contact with in fulfilling their role and the person overseeing their work.
- Check they have a clear and accurate understanding of their role and any responsibilities they will be taking on.
- Make sure they know where to find the things they need to fulfill their role (and how to work them). It is often a good idea to walk new volunteers around the building, its facilities and resources.
- Check they have appropriate skills, qualifications and experience. It might be helpful for them to 'shadow' someone more experienced who can 'show them the ropes'.
- Provide details of any meetings they are expected to attend – dates, times & locations.
- Explain the communication processes within the group – messages, phone calls, minutes of meetings etc.
- Take time early on to give new volunteers feedback on how they are doing. People like to know how they are getting on and to be given the opportunity to improve.

**Remember!** Don't assume that because people have been involved in your group or its activities for some time that they know how everything works. It is safer to give people more information than they need rather than making assumptions about their level of knowledge.

### **Example Volunteer Induction Checklist**

Name of Volunteer:

Date Induction Started:

#### **Organisation:**

- Aims & Objectives
- Structure
- Volunteer Support Structure
- Who's who in the group

#### **General:**

- What volunteer will be doing – their role/tasks
- Who to contact
- Introduction to other volunteers
- Relevant qualifications checked (first aid/instructor)
- Training & development needs discussed
- DBS Check + Cleared if needed
- The following should be given to the volunteer: Volunteer Charter & Code of Conduct
- Policies, Procedures & other important documents:

#### **The following to be read and understood (will vary with different groups):**

Child Protection (if appropriate to role)

Health & Safety

Equal Opportunities

Confidentiality (if appropriate to role)

Data Protection (if appropriate to role)

Other policies appropriate to role

Issued with list of relevant policies and knows where/how to obtain documents if required.

#### **Other Procedures**

- Locking up (if applicable)
- Claiming expenses
- Storage and Maintenance of information
- Personal use of resources – Phones etc.
- Communications– messages, meetings, notices

## **5. Supporting Volunteers**

A major reason for volunteers leaving projects is perceived lack of support;  
Support can be as simple as a phone call or as structured as a regular one-to-one appraisal;  
It is important to be clear from the outset how much support you will provide for your volunteers;  
Giving support is a worthwhile investment of time and energy and helps to contribute to the volunteer's fulfillment and the organisation's functioning;  
Remember that supporters also need support.

### **Training**

- Training is an important method of providing support
- It should be given the highest priority and needs to start before the volunteers have responsibility for service users
- Training provides relevant skills and improves quality of work
- Training also gives volunteers added assurance in their abilities
- Consult with your volunteers when arranging training and encourage them to identify areas where they would like to build confidence
- Include volunteers on any staff training

A programme of training for volunteers could include training and information on:

- An introduction to the organisation, its value base and philosophy
- Roles, responsibilities and relationships within the organisation
- Roles, responsibilities and relationships with outside organisations
- The principles of care management/community care
- User participation and the rights of users
- Record keeping
- Explanation of the formal mechanisms for reporting information/concerns
- Health and Safety
- Equal Opportunities
- First Aid and emergency reporting procedures
- Support mechanisms

Other specific issues may include

- Communication skills
- The Mental Health Act and its application
- Risk Assessment

## **6. Dealing with Problems**

- Most organisations have a Complaints or Grievance Procedure
- Volunteers should be aware of these procedures so they know the proper route to take should they have a grievance
- If you believe a volunteer is not coping in their role try working with them to overcome any barriers, which are preventing them from working effectively.
- Every effort should be made to resolve the problems before formal procedures are invoked
- Your organisation should aim to ensure a fair and consistent approach to the enforcement of standards of conduct across the organisation
- Proper systems of supervision and appraisal should allow volunteers to be offered training and guidance to improve their performance
- Eventually it may be appropriate to ask them to leave. This can sometimes be the most supportive action you can take on behalf of the individual as long as you are clear about your reasons
- You may offer the volunteer an alternative opportunity or signpost them to other organisations if they need specific help
- Try to find out why volunteers leave your organisation. This helps you to spot positive and negative trends. This information will help you to re-appraise your organisation's structure and support mechanisms. One way to gain feedback could be to use a form designed for this purpose: an 'exit' review form.

## **How can your local Volunteer Centre help?**

1. Please ask us for an “Organisation Registration Form” and an “Opportunity Registration Form”
2. When you have completed the forms and returned them to us, we will advertise your voluntary opportunities for you. You can also send us posters, leaflets and newsletters.
3. As well as advertising in our offices, at Outreach sessions and on the internet, we will search through potential volunteers that are registered with us and send them your details.
4. We are always pleased to offer your group or organisation information on issues relating to volunteering, as well as help with writing volunteer role descriptions and policies.
5. We can also help you develop new and innovative volunteering opportunities to attract a wider range of volunteers.
6. We can advise you about setting up mentoring schemes to open up your organisation to volunteers with extra support needs or who lack confidence.
7. We can keep you informed of local training workshops and courses for volunteer-involving groups.

### **Lobbying and Best Practice**

We are all members of NCVO and network with other Volunteer Centres within the ‘Volunteer Centre Partnership South Gloucestershire’ and also with other Volunteer Centres across the West of England. We aim to share best practice and add to the national voice of volunteers.





# Useful Contacts

## Volunteer Centres within South Gloucestershire

### Volunteer Centre Yate:

#### Carole Zorzo

Yate Library, 44 West Walk,

Yate, South Glos BS37 4AX

T 01454 324102

email: [volunteercentreyate@btconnect.com](mailto:volunteercentreyate@btconnect.com)

website: [www.yatevoluntarylink.org.uk](http://www.yatevoluntarylink.org.uk)

Follow us on twitter @YateVolunteers

### Volunteer Centre Patchway, Filton & the Stokes:

#### Corrina Buchanan

Patchway Library, Patchway Hub, Rodway

Road, BS34 5PE

T 01454 868986

email: [info@volunteercentre-pfs.org.uk](mailto:info@volunteercentre-pfs.org.uk)

website: [www.volunteercentre-pfs.org.uk](http://www.volunteercentre-pfs.org.uk)

### Volunteer Centre Thornbury:

#### Kim Webb

The Town Hall, High Street, Thornbury,

S Glos BS35 2AR

T 01454 413392

email: [mail@volunteer-thornbury.co.uk](mailto:mail@volunteer-thornbury.co.uk)

website: [www.volunteer-thornbury.co.uk](http://www.volunteer-thornbury.co.uk)

### Volunteering Kingswood:

#### Rosie Sinfield

The Clock Tower, Tower Road North,

Warmley BS30 8XU

T. 0117 9600376

email: [info@volunteeringkingswood.org.uk](mailto:info@volunteeringkingswood.org.uk)

website [www.communityignite.org.uk/volunteering-kingswood/volunteering-opportunities](http://www.communityignite.org.uk/volunteering-kingswood/volunteering-opportunities)

**CVS South Gloucestershire** provides development support to local groups, helping to address your needs in many areas, including: setting up new groups, governance, development, finances, planning and fundraising.

#### Chief Officer: Helen Black

Contact 01454 865205

Email: [info@cvs-sg.org.uk](mailto:info@cvs-sg.org.uk)

website [www.cvs-sg.org.uk](http://www.cvs-sg.org.uk)

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