

Set 1

InfoSheet 1.3

Introduction to Volunteering Developing your Volunteering Policies

*Developing a policy is a process of research, consultation, distribution and evaluation. This InfoSheet takes you through each of these steps, and the other InfoSheets in this series give the necessary detail for developing a policy in each distinct area you need to include, for example recruitment, selection, training, support and expenses. **It is a good idea to work through these guidelines in their entirety before beginning to write your policies.***

Why a volunteer policy?

If your organisation has decided to involve volunteers, it should produce a written record of the main points and principles of its involvement of volunteers. This can then form the basis for producing a volunteer policy which provides a useful framework within which all those involved can work.

There are a number of reasons for developing a Volunteer Policy:

- To promote volunteering within your organisation
- To help you think through the involvement of volunteers and ensure that everyone knows why and how volunteers are involved in your organisation and what kind of roles they play.
- To demonstrate the organisation's commitment to volunteers and show that they are valued.
- To provide a checklist on good practice in working with volunteers in your organisation; this should protect the organisation, volunteers and clients.
- To outline the rights and responsibilities of both volunteers and your organisation.
- To demonstrate to funders that you have thought through the involvement of volunteers and your commitment to good practice.

The process of producing a policy

A volunteering policy should include a statement as to why you involve volunteers, the principles of your volunteer-involvement and your detailed practice guidelines for working with volunteers.

The next section of this InfoSheet takes you through these different steps and there is also a **Sample Volunteering Policy** at the end of this pack (Appendix I). In addition, help, advice and training are on hand from the organisations listed in the **Useful Contacts List** (Appendix V).

Step 1 – Research

It might be useful to look at the volunteering policies of organisations similar to yours. Consider how your policy will fit in with other documents such as your *Volunteers Handbook* (see Set 4, InfoSheet 4.2) and your *Volunteer Placement Agreement* (see Set 3, InfoSheet 3.7 and Appendix III) and *Description of Tasks* (see Set 3, InfoSheet 3.2 and Appendix II).

Step 2 – Consultation

As many people as possible, both staff and volunteers, should be able to contribute to the policy. If people feel that the policy has been imposed upon them then it is unlikely to be effective. A brainstorming session about the possible roles of volunteers, areas of concern and the organisation's commitment to them can be very helpful. A written questionnaire can also be used. Try to ensure that everyone has the chance to think about the costs and benefits of volunteer involvement. If you conclude that the costs outweigh the benefits you will need to think again about involving volunteers.

It is vital that you involve people from the senior levels of your organisation so that volunteer involvement is viewed in a strategic way. Senior Management and trustees need to think about the broader issues of involving volunteers (for example, how it relates to the mission statement) and be prepared to back up the policy with the necessary resources.

Be aware of the possibility of volunteers being seen as a threat to staff jobs; it is vital that you deal with any concerns (see Set 1, InfoSheets 1.1 & 1.2). You need to carefully plan the roles your volunteers will take, ensuring they are stimulating, interesting and of mutual benefit to your organisation, your volunteers and your clients. You also need to think about tasks that are unsuitable for volunteers and you should involve staff in your discussions about this.

Set 3 of this InfoSheet series gives detailed guidelines on roles and responsibilities and information on consultation processes can be found in InfoSheet 1.2. You could also seek advice from organisations listed in the *Useful Contacts List* (Appendix V).

Step 3 – Just write it!

Think about who the policy is aimed at and how it will be distributed. Use clear language and keep it as brief as possible. It might be useful to convene a small, representative policy development team. Circulate drafts of the document and try to ensure that all the relevant people have been consulted.

Step 4 – Distribution

Think about who you will want to read the policy and how you will ensure that they get a copy. You might want to put a copy up on the office notice board as a permanent reminder of the principles of volunteer involvement in your organisation.

Step 5 – Evaluation

Establish when the policy will be reviewed to assess its success and to make modifications as the needs of your organisation evolve.

There is a sample Volunteering Policy at Appendix I of this pack.