

Management of Volunteers

Supervision, Review and Grievance

Procedures

The importance of good supervision

Regular supervision is very important. If a volunteer appears to be doing fine, it is tempting to leave them be, but this is dangerous as it means that neither the volunteer nor the supervisor are in the habit of discussing the volunteer's work. If a problem arises on either side, it then becomes much harder to tackle.

Regular supervision gives you the chance to check that the volunteer is enjoying their role, whether they need extra support, whether they would like to expand or change what they are doing, whether they would like more training, and how they are getting on with staff, clients and other volunteers. It also shows the volunteer that their work and development is important to the organisation.

Methods of supervision vary from very informal debriefing chats at the end of each day to regular formal supervision sessions. The type you use will depend on the volunteer and the task they are doing. However, the basic principle is the same. Formal or informal supervision is time you give exclusively to the volunteer, with no other distractions, to discuss how you both feel about the work they are doing. Informal sessions are fine as long as you make sure that they are happening regularly, that you are discussing the volunteer's work and that they are private enough for the volunteer to feel comfortable raising problems. It can be useful to take the volunteer outside their normal workspace, either to a private room or outside to a café. This signals to the volunteer that during that time you are there for them, and ensures that you are not distracted.

Whether you are supervising formally or informally, you will need to cover the same types of questions. Some that you might want to ask are:

- How are you finding your work at the moment?
- What do you enjoy?
- What don't you enjoy?
- Is there anything we could be doing to make your role easier?
- Is there any training you feel you need?
- Can you see other areas of work in the organisation that you would like to try?

This would also be the time to praise the volunteer for anything they have done well, and to bring up any problems. Tackling problems may seem very scary, but it is best to bring up any concerns as early as possible. Too often organisations let small concerns go and then find that they have problems if the situation gets worse. Dealing with problems early on gives the volunteer a chance to change what they are doing. If you leave it until it is too serious to ignore, the volunteer may also rightfully feel aggrieved that the problem wasn't mentioned before. Getting into a regular pattern of supervision and developing a relationship where both parties feel able to raise concerns creates an atmosphere in which people are open to criticism and can use it to learn and expand in their role.

Remember as well that it is important to praise volunteers when things are going well. Keep them informed about any positive feedback or good news that the organisation gets.

You may well want to keep records of supervision sessions. These are useful for you but would be invaluable for someone taking over your role. In line with the Data Protection Act (see InfoSheet 3.6), you should let the volunteer know what kind of notes you are keeping. It would probably be a good idea for them to have a copy as well, as it gives them a record of how they are progressing within the organisation.

Remember that your copies of supervision notes should be stored in a secure place and you should not keep hold of them longer than is necessary. How long you keep them will depend on your organisation and on the volunteer role, but when you throw them out they should be shredded or completely destroyed.

Remember that volunteers don't just need supervision; they also need support. See Set 4 for more information about supporting your volunteers.

Review and evaluation

Volunteer co-ordinators should develop a process for providing regular feedback. Although often viewed negatively by those who have to administer it, a good feedback or evaluation process is actually of value to all involved in a group or organisation. It provides volunteers with the feedback necessary to determine how well they are doing and suggestions on how to improve their performance. Regular feedback sessions with volunteers are desirable both to help the volunteer work closer to their potential, and to help the group or organisation better utilise volunteers. Feedback sessions should not deal with all the small performance problems that supervisors have been ignoring since the last supervision session. This would distract from their main function, which is to provide an overview of a volunteer's performance, and provide practical ways forward.

Volunteers should receive feedback at regular intervals. This should be more frequent when the volunteer starts (monthly for the first 6 months) and then should be at least twice a year. The value of regular formal feedback is that it forces the supervisor to let the volunteer know how they are doing and how to improve.

Evaluation as a development tool

When volunteers leave the group or organisation, it is important to ensure that you receive an evaluation of their experience. Sometimes known as an exit interview or evaluation, this interview if taken seriously can help to improve the volunteers' experience and in turn improve the group or organisation. The process enables the volunteer to discuss and sometimes lay to rest issues that may not have been resolved whilst volunteering with the group or organisation.

A system to aid in the process would include the following steps:

- Have a policy on performance, appraisal and review
- Have a policy on exit interviews

- Apply the policy to both volunteers and staff
- Develop performance criteria with each volunteer

Explain expectations and procedures in advance

The staff evaluation process can always be adapted for the evaluation process. Here are some tips for implementing a volunteer evaluation system:

- Don't get overwhelmed by forms, the substance is more important than paperwork
- Start with the volunteer task outline, this should provide a basis for discussing what the volunteer has been doing.
- Stick to the focus of task effectiveness, working relationships, comparison with the previous review
- Listen at least as much as you talk, one way to look at the evaluation session is as a follow-up volunteer interview, allowing you to see whether the needs and interests of the volunteer have changed enough to require a new assignment
- Remember that the evaluation may show as much what you need to do as what the volunteer needs to do

Grievance Procedures

Ensure that your volunteers are entitled to use the same grievance procedures as you have for paid staff and ensure that they are aware of what to do; publicise the procedure in your Volunteers' Handbook (see InfoSheet 4.3).

This information sheet is based on information from Volunteering England and the Brighton and Hove Working Together Project.