

Set 3

InfoSheet 3.6

Management of Volunteers

Volunteer Records and Data Protection

Organisations who employ staff and/or involve volunteers will almost certainly be subject to the 1998 Data Protection Act and as such must adopt principles of good practice in relation to personal information kept on volunteers.

You should ensure that all personal data relating to volunteers is:

- Fairly and lawfully processed
- Processed only for specified and lawful processes
- Adequate, relevant and not excessive
- Accurate and up-to-date
- Not kept for longer than the purpose specified
- Processed in accordance with the rights of the data subject
- Secure from the point of collection through to disposal
- Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection of data subjects

General Personal Data

You will probably keep personal data about volunteers and in order to fulfil legal and contractual responsibilities (i.e. your need to have contact details, information about the volunteer's suitability, etc.) and information in connection with organising placements for them (i.e. about their skills, experience and preferences). As such, you are entitled to keep this data, but must process and keep it in a way that accords with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Sensitive Data

You will probably also hold information referred to as 'sensitive data' under the Act in order to fulfil your organisation's broader legal obligations in relation to ethnic monitoring, disability monitoring, and in-depth personal information about people wanting to volunteer with children and vulnerable people (i.e. the personal information obtained at interview and results of CRB checks). This information is also subject to the rules of the Data Protection Act 1998.

You may hold information in the form of manual volunteer files and or computerised information (a Volunteer Database), or both. Any information you hold will be subject to the rules, regardless of whether it is held on paper or on a computer.

Seeking Consent

As a measure of good practice you should undertake to seek the explicit consent of the data subject (the volunteer) in writing. You should ask all volunteers to sign a consent form setting out the type of information you record and process and for what purposes. This statement should also contain information about confidentiality, security and access procedures. A sample Data Protection Consent Form can be found at Appendix VI.

Recording of Information

You should seek only to collect and record sensitive data on a 'need to know' basis and you should have procedures relating to the written recording of personal and sensitive data. See under 'procedures' in this InfoSheet.

Your organisation should also ensure that it has specific security procedures relating to volunteers' files to guard against anyone seeing the information that shouldn't and/or data getting damaged, lost or destroyed. These are covered in detail in the procedures section of this InfoSheet.

Rights of the Data Subject

Volunteers have the right to make a request to access all of the data you hold about them (both computerised and manual). Requests should be made in writing (letter, fax, email) and you will need to decide a process for this, e.g. will access be by appointment?

Volunteers are entitled to a description of the data being processed, an explanation of why the data is being processed, as well as a description of the source of the data and potential recipients of the data. This should be set out in the policy statement/consent form that volunteers are asked to sign (see Appendix VI).

Sample Data Protection Policy

The following policy has been adopted by the Volunteering Unit. You may adapt the policy for your own purposes should you wish to.

Volunteering Unit – Data Protection Procedures

Application Stage

5.1 Application forms will be kept secure from the point of receipt. They will be kept locked away and not left hanging around in staff in-trays.

5.2 The application form contains a statement about the Volunteering Unit's data protection policy and states where volunteers can access this document.

Interview Stage

5.3 At interview, volunteers are asked to read and sign the Volunteering Unit's Data Protection Consent Statement, the content of which will be explained to the volunteer by his or her manager.

5.4 Information given by volunteers at interview is recorded in writing on the standard interview form. Volunteers' Managers have a duty to ensure that the information recorded is adequate, relevant and not excessive. There are often circumstances where very sensitive information about the volunteer is required, for example, Independent Visitors or people volunteering with children. In other circumstances, less information is necessary and Volunteers' Managers should ensure that everything recorded in writing is relevant to the selection process.

Confidential Files

5.5 Volunteers' files are to be kept locked away at all times. They are confidential in the sense that access is between the Volunteers' Managers, The Unit Administrator and the Service Development Manager. The administrator needs access to files in order to update databases and there are times when Volunteers' Managers take on each other's work and so need mutual access to volunteer files.

5.6 Administrator's Role – the Unit Administrator will keep files locked away and secure at all times until those files can be handed to the Volunteers' Manager in person. Confidential files should not be left in in-trays or on top of Volunteers' Managers desks. All members of the Unit have a responsibility towards ensuring security and confidentiality.

Database

5.7 The database contains sensitive information in relation to religion, ethnicity and disability (for monitoring purposes) as well as other more general personal data. Access to the database is password protected and is restricted to the persons named above in 5.3.

Accuracy and Updating

5.8 Files will be kept up-to-date and checked for accuracy on a regular basis. This checking will take place at the Volunteers' review meeting with his or her Volunteers' Manager on at least a six-monthly basis.

Destroying Data

5.9 Volunteers' files will be kept for one year after he or she has left. They will be kept locked away for that period and then shredded.

