

Set 2

InfoSheet 3.2

Management of Volunteers

Volunteer Tasks, Roles and Personal Development

It is always important to develop task outlines for the potential volunteer. Any volunteer task outline should be looked on as a means to understanding your volunteers' roles within your organisation's aims and objectives and its place in the community. Task descriptions are also a way to better understand what is needed for the volunteer opportunity.

Start by answering the following questions:

- In as few words as possible, what is your volunteer's role in your community group or voluntary organisation's aims and objectives?
- What is the paid staff's (if you have any) responsibility?
- Volunteers should not be used to replace paid staff or carry out the same roles – Are the roles you plan for volunteers complimentary to those of paid staff and do they add something extra to your service?
- What could you not do, or not do as well without the help of volunteers?
- When do these activities really need to take place?
- Where do these activities really need to take place?
- What skills, personality traits and other qualifications do volunteers need to do the activities?

Next consider what goes into a volunteer task outline.

You might approach the volunteer task outline by consider the following issues:

- Desired outcome of individual project
- What you need to achieve the outcome
- The volunteer's role in helping you achieve the outcome
- The skills a volunteer needs to help you achieve the outcome

Once the above questions have been answered then you need to look at the essential elements of the volunteer task outline. Good volunteer task outlines will therefore contain the following elements:

Title: What the volunteer opportunity will be called, or what position is being offered

Purpose: The goals the voluntary activity will accomplish. This is the most important part of the volunteer task outline

Suggested Activities: Provide examples of what activities the volunteer might carry out to accomplish the purpose. The word 'suggested' indicates that the volunteer has some authority to think, to pursue other approved activities if their supervisor agrees.

Measures: How will you tell if the result has been achieved.

Requirements of Volunteer: What skills, attitudes, and knowledge are needed, as well as any requirements regarding conduct?

Time: Estimated number of hours, length of commitment, and flexibility in scheduling.

Site: Location of where activity is to be carried out.

Supervision: Relationships with staff and other volunteers, reporting requirements and supervisory relationships, as well as procedures for monitoring and dealing with problems.

Benefits: Training, insurance, parking, reimbursement of expenses, child care or carer provision, events to thank volunteers, and so on.

It is really important to ensure that you are not developing a contract of employment and you should state in your task description that in no way does your agreement with the volunteer constitute a contract of employment. It is rather a framework to enable volunteers to part of a group or organisation and be valued within that role.

When writing your task description, try to think in terms of the following:

- The aims and objective of the volunteer activity
- Resources needed to achieve the aims and objectives
- Role of volunteer(s)
- Desired qualifications of volunteer (if qualifications are absolutely necessary).
- Time, place and tool requirements

A template form is available at Appendix II of these Guidelines.

The Importance of Clear Boundaries

There should be clarity about each and every role in the organisation, as well as clearly defined and transparent lines of communication and accountability. In order to ensure that everyone is happy in their role, involve people directly in defining it at the start and refining it over time. Ask volunteers what work they would like to do and what they absolutely don't want to do. Ask paid staff which tasks they feel would be suitable for volunteers, but not the tasks that no-one else wants to do! Try to match volunteer and staff needs by designing interesting and motivational roles for each.

Good practice includes avoiding situations where people 'wear different hats'. It is better if paid staff don't volunteer for the organisation that they work for. If they do, it is important that they undertake completely different work, in order to avoid potential power struggles and unclear disciplinary situations.

If paid employment becomes available within an organisation, volunteers should be allowed to apply, but it is better to adhere to good equality and recruitment practice and to advertise, rather than simply slotting someone into a different role.

Personal Development – Updating and Negotiating Roles

Volunteer opportunities only succeed when volunteers are motivated to do the activities. To ensure this, the volunteer task outline needs to adapt to meet the needs of the volunteer.

When recruiting a volunteer, and at the time of interviewing, there should be an attempt to match the task to the needs and interests of potential volunteers, so that negotiation may take place. Further negotiation should take after the volunteer has been accepted and has begun work. As the volunteer gains more familiarity with the actual work to be done, they may make suggestions as to how the task might be modified to make it even more rewarding. With volunteers, you need to accommodate the task to the individual; to build tasks volunteers want to do.

Personal Development – Ongoing Training

Determining what training a volunteer may need requires answering three questions.

- What information do they need to successfully perform the work?
- What skills do they need to successfully perform the work?
- What attitudes or approaches do they need to successfully perform the work?

Training to provide this information, develop these skills and engender these attitudes can be provided as formal training or coaching.

Formal Training

Formal training comes in many guises. Its main aim is to prepare volunteers for specific jobs

Training can be presented in many ways and may be done in-house, externally, or jointly with other groups/organisations, and includes:

- On-the-job training
- Practical demonstrations
- Work shadowing
- Buddying/mentoring systems
- Visiting other organisations/inviting outside organisations
- Attending conferences, workshops, lectures, seminars, etc.
- Role plays and simulations
- Problem-solving exercises, group discussions, brainstorming, etc.
- Speakers and films at meetings
- One-off training sessions of varying lengths
- Linked or modular courses, consisting of several sessions over a period of time
- Distance learning
- Structured reading programmes.

It is recommended that a variety of techniques are used, which combine listening, discussing, observing and doing, as this will help to maintain attention and interest.

There are two main areas to cover in volunteer training regardless of the job for which the training is being provided.

First communicate to the volunteer:

1. This is what you should do and accomplish in your role;
2. This is what you should not do;
3. This is what you should do in the following situations...

The second area might be in terms of the description of roles and responsibilities. It would include training which communicates to the volunteer the web of relationships in which they will work:

1. This is with whom you will be working and this is your task;
2. This is the role and how it fits into the task.

Coaching

Coaching is a process of teaching or upgrading skills. It can be used in formal training sessions or in on-the-job training. It will most often be provided by the supervisor of the volunteer or a more experienced co-worker. Effective coaching follows a three-step process:

1. A demonstration of the skill to be learned or improved
2. Observation of the volunteer trying out the skill
3. Feedback and analysis.

The skill can be demonstrated by anyone expert in that area. Either the person demonstrating the skill or the supervisor, trainer, or volunteer co-ordinator, should explain why the expert is doing what she is doing. The point of the demonstration is not just to allow the volunteer to see what is being done but to understand it.

To take an extremely simple example, if you were to demonstrate to a volunteer how to answer the telephone, you might have the volunteer watch you answer the phone a few times; then you might observe the volunteer answering the phone; finally you might have the volunteer answer the phone without being observed. After each stage you would discuss the experience with the intention that the volunteer learn from it. You will need to give constructive feedback and be careful not to patronise the volunteer.

Information in this InfoSheet is based on guidelines produced by Brighton and Hove Volunteer Bureau and information from the National Centre for Volunteering, www.volunteering.org.uk