

MANAGING & SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS

Factsheet 5

Recruiting, inducting, training and supporting volunteers takes time. Once you have made the decision to involve volunteers in your organisation, someone needs to take on responsibility for overseeing this involvement. This may well be a different person from the staff working with and supporting volunteers on a day-to-day basis. This role is often referred to as Volunteer Manager or Volunteer Coordinator where it forms a distinct position, but in smaller groups someone will often be carrying out this function alongside another role. Where this is the case they should be given adequate time and support for the volunteer management aspect of their work.



After you've recruited your volunteers, they will need support. You should decide what level of support and supervision you need based on possible risks.

You can offer regular meetings with volunteers to see how things are going and get to know them. You could talk about:

- what they are enjoying about their role
- successes they have had
- difficulties they've had
- support or training they might need going forward.

It can be hard to find time to talk to each volunteer, especially if you are responsible for many. But it's essential to give volunteers the opportunity to give and receive feedback. Make it clear who volunteers should contact if they have a problem, and when this help is available. If volunteers are active in the evenings or weekends, you may need to offer support at those times.

Some volunteer roles will be easier to oversee than others. If volunteers are at home or in the community, you won't be able to check what they are doing all the time. Nor would that feel like a positive experience.

Give people the resources and guidance they need so that they can be as independent as possible. A reporting or logging system helps you see what volunteers have done. Debriefs at the end of shifts let volunteers talk through their tasks and any concerns they had.

Make sure it's clear to everyone who has responsibility for supervising volunteers. This might be a different person from the one who recruited and chose the volunteers.

Roles that are emotionally demanding or more specialist might need further supervision. Some volunteers offer caring or clinical services, such as counselling or psychotherapy. Be clear how they will get supervision to meet professional and ethical standards.

Feedback from volunteers is vital to providing a good experience. You can learn what they enjoy about volunteering and what might be causing them problems. You can also find out how useful the training and support you offer is for their role.

Volunteers are often the best support for each other. Make it easy for volunteers to speak to and learn from others. You can do this by setting up group sessions, having a buddy system or by having online spaces they can use.

In order to manage volunteers successfully, some of your organisational policies should encompass volunteers, either due to your legal responsibilities towards them or the people they work with.

Beyond this it makes sense to have some volunteering-specific policies and procedures in place to give a structure to your involvement of volunteers. In addition, a specific volunteer policy sets out how volunteers will be involved and can be a really good place to spell out the values and ethos behind your volunteer involvement.

It's also important to consider any risks associated with your volunteer involvement. We often think of risk assessment as solely to do with health and safety, but there are all kinds of risks that need to be considered. With volunteers risks can include:

- Health and safety
- Safeguarding
- Professional Boundaries
- Financial risk
- Reputational risk
- Organisational risk

For further information please see:

[Involving volunteers | NCVO](#)

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