

Developing a Volunteer Handbook

The following are important potential items to include in your volunteer handbook:

1. Organisation Mission Statement

A mission statement is a paragraph which defines any organisation's reason for existence. It embodies its goals, philosophies and intended activities essential to the identity of the organisation. A mission statement clarifies the purpose of the organisation to promote focus and helps to create a clear identity within the community. It is an important snapshot for the volunteer and may help clarify their own vision of how they can be involved in the fulfillment of your mission.

2. Objectives/Goals of the Organisation

This section includes specific courses of action for achieving your organisation's mission. Defining the actual activities of your organisation helps the volunteer get a general sense of where they can "plug in" and contribute.

3. Organisational Chart / Staff or Volunteer Listing

Entering an organisation can be daunting and sometimes confusing to a new volunteer. It is not always clear how things are organised or who is responsible for what aspects of the organisation's mission. Developing an Organisational Chart can be very helpful in clarifying some of these things. This provides the volunteer with a map of "who's who" and allows an avenue for communication should the volunteer have questions for specific members of the map. It also allows the volunteer to be able to communicate about the organisation clearly to members of the public if asked.

Here are some things to consider in developing an Organisational Chart:

- If your organisation is affiliated with other organisations create a chart to show this relationship. This may include partnerships, funding sources and the umbrella organisations under which your own falls
- Identify the hierarchy of your organisation if there is one. Who is in each particular role and what are the duties prescribed to that role (briefly). This is especially important for identifying people with whom the volunteer may be interacting on a regular basis.
- Does your Organisation have a Volunteer Coordinator? Who supervises volunteers, or in other words, who is the new volunteer's primary "go to" person?

4. Role Descriptions

A role description is an essential part of a satisfying volunteer experience. It is a means for both you and your volunteer to understand the volunteer's role in achieving your organisation's vision and goals. People are better able to determine whether the role suits their needs and skills when a written description of their role is provided at the outset. They are also more likely to succeed in meeting your expectations when those are clearly articulated. While the role description is an essential tool in welcoming a new volunteer, it is best kept as a separate document from the orientation manual. That manual is a standard document that applies to every volunteer. Even the smallest of organisations is likely to need more than one volunteer role, but any one volunteer only requires the role description that applies to him/her. Regardless of how it is presented, no volunteer should be invited into an organisation without a written description of the role.

Sample: Role Description Template

- Role Title (Should describe the role. Note that "Volunteer" does not describe a role)
- Responsible to: (name and position of the person that supervises this volunteer role)
- Role importance: How does this role contribute to the well-being of clients and/or the success of this Organisation?
- Responsibilities: Provide details of expectations. These are the details upon which a performance evaluation should be based.
- Include expectations for participating in training.
- Detail any reporting requirements on client activities, tasks, time sheets.
- What are the minimum qualifications and credentials necessary to perform this role?
- Recommended Skills: Include previous work experience and personal qualities that will help ensure success in this role.
- Evaluation: Describe how and when performance is evaluated, and whether this is an opportunity for the volunteer to provide feedback on the role

5. Map/building plan

Depending on the size of your organisation it may be necessary to provide each volunteer with a map of your building and surrounding area. Giving a personal tour is ideal to familiarize the volunteer and make them feel at home. Be sure to identify places where the volunteer will do their volunteering, where their supervisor may be or where they can take breaks.

6. Emergency Procedures

Including emergency procedures can set the new volunteer's mind at ease, prevent injury and ease liability on your organisation. What is your organisation's protocol in the case of an emergency? Your floor plan can include locations of emergency exits and first aid kits. Your organisational chart can include contact people who would be in charge should an emergency situation occur.

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7. Hours of Operation

Indicate here when your organisation is open to the public or when normal working hours are. Be clear as to whether this is the time during which volunteers will be required or if they will be performing their duties outside of normal business hours.

8. Using Vehicles

Be clear about parking and vehicle details. In this portion of your handbook include a map of parking areas, whether or not volunteer vehicles need to be registered and how to do that and any role specific information regarding vehicles (for example if a volunteer is to drive a vehicle belonging to your organisation or if they will be using their own vehicle for their role, what are expectations around insurance, maintaining fuel levels, vehicle maintenance, etc.)

9. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Many organisations ask that volunteers, who may interact with their clients, and have access to information, sign a confidentiality agreement as a legal bond to protecting the people with whom they work. It is also important for volunteers to understand the Data Protection Act and how you will keep their information safe and secure.

10. Communications

Does your organisation have a formalized way of communicating with your volunteers about the activities of the organisation? What does it look like? Some organisations offer monthly/quarterly newsletters that keep people up to speed on what's happening. Other groups hold meetings and informal gatherings to create networks and share information. Depending on the size of your operation it may be sufficient to simply schedule meetings for volunteers with their coordinators. Websites are often utilized now as a forum for posting news and even receiving emails from people interested or involved in your organisation.

11. Dealing with Media

Everyone in your organisation should know how to respond if approached by the media to give a statement about your organisation or their experience there. It is important to designate someone to deal with the media specifically and ensure that that all paid and volunteer staff know who this person is. This takes pressure off your staff, prevents any misinformation and allows for consistency in communications with the public.

12. Paid Staff and Volunteer Relations

If there are both paid and volunteer staff within your organisation, clarify the relationship between these two important groups to maximise potential for positive working relationships. Explain:

- Who is responsible for what work?
- Who is responsible for volunteer supervision, given that volunteers may be working in areas that involve paid staff?
- How shall each be recognized? How much input shall volunteers and paid staff have into the development of your Organisation? What are the avenues for such input?

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Following is a brief statement addressing some of these questions. However, your organisation may require a more involved look at this topic. Contact your Volunteer Centre if your organisation would like to access additional resources and samples in this area.

Sample:

Paid staff and volunteers come together at X to work toward achieving the mission, goals and objectives of the organisation. Both contribute in significant ways and volunteers are seen to compliment the work done by paid staff. Volunteers do not replace or displace paid positions. We value the experience and insights of both paid and volunteer staff and encourage feedback about our organisation, processes and programs. Such feedback can be passed through respective supervisors or addressed at our Staff/Volunteer Meetings

13. Volunteers and Benefits

Volunteers must not be paid for the role they do: to do so may be breaking the law and incur penalties for the volunteer, especially if they are in receipt of state benefits, and cause income tax and national insurance issues for the organisation. Out of pocket expenses should be offered to volunteers and receipts should be required. If your volunteers choose not to take expenses ask them to “donate” them to your organisation so you can keep a true record of how much it costs to run your organisation.

14. Grievance Policy

What is your Organisation’s process for dealing with complaints or concerns? Provide your volunteers with a standard process for handling these situations properly – the same process that applies to paid staff.

15. Resignation/Leaving the Volunteer Program

Describe the “exit protocol” expected within your organisation, whether that is a telephone call or a written letter of resignation when a volunteer intends to discontinue serving your organisation. If a volunteer ‘signs on’ for a predetermined time with a specific ending point, you may determine that no notice of resignation is necessary. However those endings happen, don’t miss the opportunity to send every volunteer who leaves on good terms a note of thanks. While they may not serve in your organisation any longer, their positive attitude toward your cause or service will be known in the community.

Many organisations choose to conduct an exit interview/questionnaire which allows the volunteer to state his/her reasons for leaving and reflect upon their experience during their commitment. This is a useful tool for strengthening your volunteer programme.

Dismissing a volunteer is never a pleasant task, but it is made much easier if the grounds for terminating a volunteer’s service are clear from the beginning. Grounds for termination can be stated either in this section of the volunteer Handbook or in the Volunteer Agreement Document.

Consider including a short list of ‘agreement-breakers’ like breach of confidentiality, failure to carry out duties assigned in role description and/or failure to complete required training. (Be careful to avoid any reference to obligation as this could constitute an “employment”

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16. Insurance and Liability Coverage

Just as employees must be accounted for under your organisation's liability insurance, so too must your volunteers. Ensure that your coverage is suitable for the activities of volunteers within your organisation. Be sure to discuss special event coverage with your provider if applicable. Provide volunteers with a brief statement to describe what insurance coverage is in place to protect them.

For more information and support contact DeVA on 0845 6099901 or email us at support@devonva.org The full range of Information sheet are available to download at http://www.devonva.org/information_and_guidance

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