



volunteer centres

Ionaid d'Oibrí Deonacha na hÉireann

IRELAND

developing a volunteer policy for your organisation

a step by step guide

Congratulations! You have decided to recruit volunteers for your organisation. There is no doubt that you are about to benefit from a cost effective human resource, but your organisation is also going to benefit in other ways too:

- Volunteers are a true reflection of community spirit
- Volunteers extend an organisation's network
- Volunteers increase the diversity of an organisation

So, what happens after you recruit your volunteers? Have you thought of the issues that might arise through the involvement of volunteers in your project? Are you and your organisation ready for volunteers?



Before recruiting any volunteers, your organisation needs to be prepared. It needs to know why it wants to involve volunteers in its work, how volunteer positions fit into the organisation and it must be ready to receive willing volunteers when contacted.

By having your organisation prepared you are preparing a positive experience for your volunteers, and ensuring that the right people will be assigned to the right opportunity.

"Always remember, happy volunteers tell people about their experiences, as do unhappy volunteers ..."

Every organisation should have a volunteer policy in place and this step-by-step guide is designed to help you through the stages of putting such a policy together. Obviously, this is a guide and will not necessarily apply to every organisation or to every volunteer, but your local volunteer bureau or centre will be happy to assist groups on an individual basis with specific issues.

A formal policy gives clear guidelines for decision-making and instruction on how to carry through or act on decisions made. It also assists in the management of potential risks that might occur involving volunteers, such as accidents and abuse. It ensures that things run smoothly and that volunteers are properly recruited and well managed, and it serves as an aid to effectiveness, which allows the organisation to get the most out of its volunteers.

step one why involve volunteers?

The first step in designing a volunteer policy is to decide why the organisation wishes to involve volunteers. This decision will:

- Determine the types of roles and responsibilities that the organisation will create for volunteers;
- Enable the organisation to better explain to volunteers how and why they are contributing to the work of the organisation;
- Enable the organisation to better explain to staff why volunteers are being sought;
- Enable the organisation to develop a plan for evaluating how effective their use of volunteers has been.

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step two framing a volunteer policy

After examining why the organisation wishes to recruit and involve volunteers a policy can be laid out under the following headings:

- The Volunteer Programme
- Volunteer Management Procedures
- Volunteer Recruitment & Selection
- Volunteer Training Development
- Volunteer Supervision & Evaluation
- Volunteer Support & Recognition

The Volunteer Programme A brief description of how volunteer roles are viewed and valued within the organisation coupled with the organisational mission statement and the definition of a volunteer. It should also refer to the rights and responsibilities of the volunteer.

The programme should broadly cover all volunteers within the project from members of the management committee to project workers and state the position of the organisation on having clients and relatives of clients of the organisation as volunteers.

Volunteer management procedures A statement should be made referring to how volunteer personnel records will be kept and that they will be treated with the same confidentiality as staff records.

Statements should also be made on how volunteers are expected to represent the organisation and how they are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all the privileged information to which they are exposed and how failure to do so could result in termination of the volunteer's relationship with the organisation.

Issues such as dress code, timesheets and the issue of volunteer's workspace should also be dealt with here.

Volunteer recruitment and selection Under this heading, reference should be made to the volunteer role descriptions that volunteers will be given (similar to job descriptions for staff members), how volunteers will be recruited and whether it is an on-going process. It should also outline the interview process.

It is also advisable at this stage to clearly state the organisation's position in relation to security checks on volunteers working with clients that fall into the at risk category and the organisation's position in relation to collecting references from volunteers.

Will a probationary period be offered to all volunteers? How will the length of service of volunteers be assessed and will leave of absence be covered?

Volunteer training and development A statement should be made stating how each volunteer will receive initial orientation training and outline whom in the organisation will provide this training.

It should also be outlined how the organisation will support further education for the volunteer and/or support volunteer's attendance at relevant conferences.

Volunteer supervision and evaluation Who will supervise the volunteers? Will it be one individual within the organisation or will supervision occur in a line management fashion. Who do volunteers communicate grievances to?

What is expected from volunteers in terms of absenteeism and who do they contact should they be unable to complete a scheduled duty?

How will volunteer performances be evaluated and by whom, and how will corrective action be outlined to volunteers?

How will the organisation handle the dismissal of a volunteer and what reasons constitute dismissal?

Volunteer support and recognition Here it is important to state the organisation's position in relation to reimbursing volunteers for out of pocket expenses. Will the organisation refund bus fares, car parking or other such costs? Are all volunteers covered by the organisation's insurance policy?

How will the voluntary effort within an organisation be recognised? Will there be an annual event, or will each volunteer be recognised at different times of the year?

step three keeping the policy alive

Start small and ensure that your policy is distributed to everyone in the organisation and is 'owned' by the organisation. Get the input of staff on the issues outlined in step two and use them. It is not much use if you put a policy together but nobody else sees it and it sits in a file!

It may seem that there is a lot involved in developing a volunteer policy but the reward to doing so is immeasurable and can be summed up as follows:

"Their niceness will let you recruit a volunteer the first time, but only your competence will let you keep them."

Steve McCurley

Managing volunteers within an organisation can be complex, but by preparing the organisation you are preparing a positive experience for those individuals that are prepared to give up their free time and commit to assisting your project aims.

Your local volunteer bureau or centre will be more than happy to assist groups on an individual basis with the preparation of their volunteer policies and can be contacted as follows:

Volunteer Centres Ireland is the national infrastructure of volunteer bureaux across the country and is supported by the Irish Government through the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs.