

### LSE Volunteer Centre best practice guide

#### **Introduction**

The information provided in this guide seeks to give organisations an overview of best practice when it comes to working with volunteers. It is intended as a summary of relevant issues to help you plan or develop your work with volunteers.

#### **Volunteer policy**

Many groups and organisations find it helpful to have a 'volunteer policy' in place to summarise in a single document how they will recruit, involve and support volunteers. Volunteer policies can add value to all types of volunteer-involving organisations, from community groups to large hospital trusts. When developed well, volunteer policies are useful to volunteers in setting out what they can expect from the organisation and to volunteer co-ordinators in helping them to provide good quality, consistent support to volunteers.

Check out KickStart Ghana's [volunteer policy](#) for an example.

#### **Recruiting**

##### **Role description**

A role description helps to recruit student volunteers – students will imagine what they will be doing and they can decide if the role and organisation is right for them before applying. This will be the first thing that they read on LSE CareerHub so it's a chance to inspire and give information.

Check out our top tips on how to write a good role description.

##### **Opportunity name**

Try to come up with a title that attracts people's attention. Don't use something generic like 'Admin Assistant' or 'General Helper'. There are many opportunities on LSE CareerHub, make sure yours stands out.

##### **Opportunity description**

Research shows that most people scan pages when reading information on a screen. This is why it's really important to make your opportunity concise and logical. Make it short and snappy so not to lose the reader's attention.

When writing the description try to answer the following questions:

- What does the role involve?
- Who will the volunteer be working with?
- What skills do they need?
- What skills will they develop?
- What benefit will that volunteer bring to the organisation and the beneficiaries?
- When and where will the opportunity be taking place?

### Checklist

Do:

- Keep it short and snappy.
- Put important information at the beginning.
- Make it interesting.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Make sure you've answered the questions above.

Don't:

- Use generic titles like 'Admin Assistant'.
- Have a boring opportunity, make sure it's inspiring.

### DBS checks

The Disclosure and Barring Service (previously known as the Criminal Records Bureau) helps employers make safer recruitment decisions and prevent unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups, including children. If you are unsure about whether a volunteer should have a DBS check for an opportunity you should refer [guidance from the government](#).

DBS checks can be issued for international students but they will only check the period during which the student has lived in the UK. It is recommended that a student who has lived outside the UK for a continuous period of six months or more within the past five years should obtain a 'Certificate of Good Conduct' from their embassy. Please refer to [government advice](#) for further information on this.

### References

References can add to your picture of a volunteer, helping you to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and occasionally alerting you to potential problems. They also help to confirm the volunteer is who they say they are. However you should bear in mind that some potential volunteers may not have been employed, or may have been out of employment

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for some time. In order to avoid creating barriers you will need to be flexible about who you will accept a reference from.

### **Managing volunteers**

#### **Volunteer induction**

An induction is really important as it helps the volunteer feel valued and ensures greater understanding surrounding the organisation. This is a chance to find out more about the volunteer as well, like what aims they have for their placement.

Explaining what the organisation's goals are, and how it goes about achieving them, and helping the volunteers understand where they fit within the organisation as a whole. You might include:

- Background/history of the organisation
- Mission statement
- Services provided and client groups
- Organisation chart
- Talks from paid staff and established volunteers about their roles in relation to volunteers and the organisation as a whole

Ensuring that volunteers have a clear understanding of their role and how they will carry it out, as well as site-specific information and guidance on support and supervision mechanisms.

- Health and safety issues e.g. H&S policy, first aid procedures, accident reporting, policy on smoking, emergency exits and evacuation procedures
- Financial issues e.g. how to claim expenses (and what can be claimed)
- Volunteer policy (what the volunteer can expect from the organisation, and vice versa)
- Arrangements for support and supervision, including if appropriate, allocating a key member of staff, mentor or buddy
- Problem-solving procedures (discipline/grievance/complaints)
- Training programme/training needs identification process
- Relevant policies e.g. confidentiality, data protection, phone/internet use, time off etc.
- Let volunteers know about office rules. For example where the tea and coffee facilities are, where to put coats, where they will sit, what happens at break times and what everyone else does.

#### **Support and supervision**

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Volunteer support is vitally important and can be provided in a number of ways, both formally and informally. One way is to have regular meetings with a supervisor. This can provide an opportunity for volunteers to air concerns, discuss work, ask questions, help in identifying skills gained and feel rewarded.

- The time should be given exclusively to the volunteer with no distractions and a space that allows the volunteer to raise any confidential issues they may have.
- Use the time to give feedback and praise the volunteer. You may want to keep notes of meetings.
- Always identify a staff member who will be the supervisor, and make sure the volunteer knows who this is.

### Training

Training offered should be linked to the role that the person is carrying out, rather than a general perk or enticement to volunteer.

The training your volunteers receive will depend entirely on the kind of work they will be doing, and on the numbers of volunteers you need to train at any one time. Initial training may be required to enable the volunteer to carry out their role effectively, and depending on the role, may take hours, days or weeks to complete.

On-going or refresher training may also be required to keep volunteers skills fresh, or to enable them to develop within the organisation and to take on further tasks.

When developing a training policy you will need to decide what will best meet your organisational requirements, bearing in mind the resources you have at your disposal.

### Recognition

Recognition is also important; there are specific measures to reward or recognise volunteers - certificates, parties, volunteer events, references etc. More important than the big gestures though are the everyday things you do to let volunteers know they are valued. A simple 'thank you' goes a long way.

### Health and safety policy

Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places a duty on employers (i.e. an organisation that employs at least one paid member of staff) "to ensure, as far as reasonably practical, that persons not in their employment, who may be affected by their undertaking, are not exposed to risks to their health and safety" and "to give information as might as might affect their health or safety".

It is therefore sensible for any organisation to have:

- Written risk assessments.
- Include volunteers in your Health and Safety Policy.
- Make sure volunteers are aware of it: Provide a volunteer handbook and induction process

### Risk assessments

There is a duty on employers to carry out risk assessments. It is hard to argue that the duty of care is being taken seriously if no effort has been made to look at what could go wrong for volunteers and how they could be protected. It makes sense for even volunteer-only organisations to adopt a systematic approach.

When working with volunteers it makes sense to have an overall risk assessment for the volunteer programme and have a separate, and probably smaller, risk assessment for individual roles.

### Liability and insurance

Regardless of the legal structure of the organisation, it is important that volunteers are adequately insured. This means checking that existing policies extend to volunteers. Two of the most important insurances are employers' liability and public liability. Although the law does not compel organisations to insure volunteers under employers' liability, it is clearly advisable for them to do so because otherwise they may be open to negligence claims brought by volunteers.

As an organisation, it would be good practice to follow these pointers to ensure that you have the appropriate insurance in place to cover your volunteers:

- Ensure that your policies explicitly mention volunteers because they may not be automatically included in your insurance cover
- Check with your insurer if there are upper and lower age limits for volunteers before recruiting younger or older volunteers
- Make sure that your insurance company is aware of the types of activities that the volunteers will be doing, because if the tasks are high-risk then the insurance policies will need to be adapted to accommodate these risks
- Produce a written risk assessment for each of the roles that volunteers will be performing. This will help your insurer to tailor your policy to suit your needs.

### Working with vulnerable clients

Organisations with vulnerable clients have an enhanced duty of care and should have a child protection policy or vulnerable adult protection policy in place. Typical measures may include:

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- Taking up references
- Training and induction
- Adequate supervision
- Proper channels for volunteers and others to raise concerns

### Volunteer drivers

Drivers using their own vehicles should inform their insurers of their voluntary activities. To avoid confusion with commercial use of the vehicle, they should make it clear that they will receive out-of-pocket expenses only. Volunteer drivers should not accept an increase in premium, and may wish to change insurer if their current one insists on an extra charge. It is good practice for drivers' expenses to be reimbursed.

Organisations should make sure that volunteers have informed their insurers of their volunteer driving. A simple way to do this would be to provide a standard letter for volunteers with a return slip for the insurance company to complete. Contingent motor liability insurance may be available to cover organisations if an accident occurs and there is a problem with the volunteer's insurance.

### Data protection and copyright

If information kept on volunteers falls into the Data Protection Act 1998's definition of 'personal data', the organisation has legal duties concerning the collection, storage, use of and disclosure of such information.

Under the law, personal data must be:

- Fairly and lawfully processed.
- Obtained only for specified and lawful purposes.
- Adequate, relevant and not excessive for the purposes for which it is processed.
- Accurate and up to date.
- Not kept longer than necessary.
- Processed in accordance with the rights of individuals.
- Kept secure.
- Not transferred to countries where data protection legislation is inadequate.

No clear guidelines exist for the retention of volunteer records, but organisations should follow the data protection principle that data should not be kept longer than for the purpose for which it was taken.

Copyright normally belongs to the person who created the work. The law says that material produced by employees belongs to their employer but makes no mention of volunteers. Therefore organisations should ask volunteers to transfer copyright to them or agree a licence whereby the organisation can use the work within agreed limits. While this may seem a trivial issue, Volunteering England has heard of cases where volunteers have been

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producing work for important publications such as annual reviews, but following disputes with their organisations have refused to allow them to use their work.

### Expenses

Whilst unpaid, volunteering should not leave volunteers out of pocket, otherwise it can be difficult to involve a diverse range of people. That's why it is good practice to reimburse a volunteer for the expenses they incur.

Whilst this should be a straightforward matter, there are a number of legal and good practice issues to be aware of, including ensuring you do not inadvertently grant employment rights to volunteers. Organisations should ensure that they are reimbursing out of pocket expenses only. Flat rate expenses payments, or indeed any sum over and above actual expenses, are likely to be seen as income from the point of view of benefits and tax, and could change the legal status of volunteers to that of employees.

### Grievance and Complaints Procedure

The host organisation should make it clear to the volunteer the procedure for making a grievance or complaint. Organisations should aim to treat all volunteers fairly. However, if a situation does occur where a volunteers feels they have been treated unfairly, there should be a procedure to make this known to their supervisor.

### Review

It is important to review your policies and procedures regularly to ensure that you are adhering to best practice. Asking volunteers to feedback either through exit interviews or during their time volunteering is a good way of finding out how volunteering at your organisation works for them and how you can develop your services more effectively.

### Disclaimer

We have made every effort to ensure that this information was correct at the time of publication. It is intended as a summary of relevant issues to help you plan or develop your work with volunteers. The London School of Economics is unable to accept liability for any loss or damage or inconvenience arising as a consequence of the use of this information.