

Writing a volunteer policy

By following the advice in this guide, you will be able to write a volunteer policy.

What is a volunteer policy and why does your organisation need one?

A volunteer policy is a written document that helps define the role of volunteers within the organisation. It clearly explains the organisation's activities and what is expected of volunteers. Having a clear volunteer policy demonstrates to your Board, staff, funders and volunteers, your organisation's commitment to its volunteer programme and to individual volunteers. It ensures fairness and consistency in managing volunteers and helps volunteers know where they stand, how they can expect to be treated and what to do if there is an issue. Your policy will also help to clarify the position of volunteers in relation to paid staff and highlight the value of volunteers as a planned part of an organisation, rather than a separate add on service. A volunteer policy sets boundaries, lays down processes for eventualities, ensures good management and can help with volunteer retention because it emphasises their importance.

Where do you start?

A good way to start writing your volunteer policy is to ask, *'Why does your organisation want to involve volunteers, how do you intend to involve them in your organisation and what do they contribute?'* It is valuable at this stage to get input from existing staff, management and existing volunteers. This helps to get a balanced view and creates a sense of 'ownership' for all those involved. It is particularly important to include paid staff in this process, to help reduce any fears that they may have regarding volunteer involvement in the organisation. Consulting with management ensures that the value of volunteers is taken seriously.

How will you introduce and implement your volunteer policy?

The policy can be introduced by giving all staff, management and existing volunteers the opportunity to contribute to its writing. All existing staff and volunteers can then be given a copy of the finished policy, whilst new staff and volunteers can be introduced to the policy as part of their induction to your organisation. It is also useful to have a copy of the policy on display; or you could promote it more creatively, e.g., by having key policy statements.

What should be included in a volunteer policy?

Introduction to your organisation's purpose and the part volunteers play.

There are no set rules for writing a volunteer policy, as all organisations are different, and your policy will reflect your organisation and your volunteers' needs. It is useful, however, to start with a concise introduction to your organisation and why volunteers are involved in its activities. Your volunteer policy should be short, user friendly and refer to other policies but not necessarily include them here, otherwise the document could be unwieldy to use. You can include brief statements of 'intent' such as equal opportunities and diversity, confidentiality and health and safety essentials i.e., the duty to report. Full length policies can be included in

training or development sessions or in an induction pack or volunteer handbook. Other sections you can feature include:

Roles and Responsibilities

You can include your volunteer role description here for volunteers to refer to and/or list other roles in case a volunteer wants to know the full breadth of the opportunities of the organisation.

Recruitment, Selection & Matching

You can outline your process for advertising and selecting your volunteers.

Support & Supervision

It is wise to detail how you protect and listen to your volunteers to avoid dissatisfaction, conflict and the process for solving problems.

Expenses & Insurance

Your organisation may have a separate expenses policy with more detail, or you may want to include a short summary of what volunteers can claim for and what they need to do. You can also explain how your insurance covers your volunteers and what actions fall outside of this.

Training & Development

Here you can write about how you develop your volunteers' skills and any obligatory or optional training. It is considered essential to summarise the induction of your volunteers, so they know what is going to be covered for them to be able to undertake their role effectively with enough knowledge.

Volunteers Voice & Recognition

To show you value the voice of your volunteers, you may want to include how you gather feedback from volunteers either from their experience in their role or opinions on the wider organisation. You may include how you recognise and reward their contribution whether that is by organising events, thank you cards or awards.

Endings

It is always sensible to describe what happens if a volunteer or the organisation feels that their values, ethos and expectations don't fit, so volunteers are aware before problems arise that they will be treated equitably.

Make your volunteer policy clear and accessible to all

Everyone should be aware of the key statements in your volunteer policy, and you can feature testimonials from existing volunteers, displayed on walls or in different locations around the organisation, together with images of volunteers.

Finally

Review and improve your policy regularly, make it a living document that reflects your organisation and your volunteer's needs.

For more information:

[5.1 A Good Volunteer Policy | Resource Kit \(vaslan.org.uk\)](https://vaslan.org.uk) – **Produced by** Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire, includes a checklist of what you can include.

[Volunteer Policy - Community Works \(bhcommunityworks.org.uk\)](https://bhcommunityworks.org.uk) – Produced by Brighton and Hove and gives a great explanation of the benefits of having a volunteer policy and other elements of a volunteering programme.

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