

**Training and Supporting Volunteers**

Just like a paid employee in post, your volunteers need to feel confident that they have all the information and resources they need, in order to carry out their tasks for your organisation or project. Best practice in Volunteer Management dictates you should provide the **training** your volunteers need, which begins with an **induction**, followed by either informal or formal **training**, or a mixture of both, with ongoing **support and supervision.**

**Induction**

Induction of new volunteers is a form of training, and the start of an ongoing process. There is a lot of information which the new volunteer needs in order to be able to do their tasks, and it can be overwhelming at first. You need to separate the things they need to know now from the things they need to know later. You might like to draw up a volunteer induction checklist, especially if you might be taking on several new volunteers, to make sure you cover everything needed.

A template volunteer induction checklist is provided at the end of this document.

If you regularly take on new volunteers, you could produce a Volunteer Induction Pack. If you, or someone in your organisation, are really creative, you might try to make inductions more fun and memorable by such as turning a list of facts into a quiz, or making clues for a ‘treasure hunt’ around the premises.

**Training**

This might be informal, such as a new volunteer shadowing an experienced volunteer, or having an experienced volunteer as a ‘buddy’ or mentor. Be aware that if experienced volunteers have bad habits, they may pass them on.

It might be formal, with the volunteer attending a training course, put on by your own organisation or another. You might provide volunteers with a volunteer manual, checklist for working in certain situations (lone working; visiting people in their own homes; etc.), or operations procedures (‘how to do it’ for their tasks). Make sure they have access to all relevant policies, including the Volunteer Involvement Policy.

Volunteers may ask the same question(s) every time they come in – be patient and bear in mind that there may be a relatively long time between their sessions, so they may forget.

Training is for experienced volunteers, as well as new ones. Training keeps volunteers fresh, motivated and aware of the organisation’s aims, standards, effects on the service users and the volunteers’ reasons for helping. It also helps stop bad habits becoming entrenched; once they do so, they can be very hard to break. Also, circumstances change, ways of doing things change, information technology changes, and volunteer roles change.

One point about training – you should only provide training which the volunteer needs in order to carry out their tasks, or to prepare to take on new tasks. If you provide training which the volunteer wants, but which is not of use to them in their volunteering with you, eg sending a volunteer befriender on a computer skills training course, when they do not need to use a computer for their volunteering with you, then the HM Revenue & Customs would regard that as a ‘benefit in kind’, and would want the volunteer to pay income tax on the commercial cost of the training. If you do this for a volunteer who is on benefits, you will cause them similar problems.

**Supervision**

Volunteer Supervision is a one-to-one, two-way process between a supervisor and a volunteer, where the supervisor’s goal is to empower the volunteer to be successful. It thrives on mutual trust, respect and recognition of each person’s value to the organisation.

It helps both people; the volunteer gets support, guidance, feedback (including praise), and information about the organisation. The supervisor gets to know the volunteer, how things inside and outside the organisation affect them, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how best to enable them to make the most of their performance and rewards.

Although supervision is best practice, in some particular volunteering roles it may be essential and may be an explicit condition of funding that supports your programme. An example where this could be the case would be counselling volunteers who are working with vulnerable people, supervision in this case may be necessary as a way of professionally offloading.

Regular supervision is vital, because: -

* Your training won’t cover everything, and even if it does, naturally your volunteers are unlikely to remember it all
* Problems evolve, and when they do, it’s the best way of dealing quickly and effectively with them
* You need to check on your volunteers’ performance and wellbeing, e.g. to avoid burnout, for the good of both volunteer and organisation
* It’s an investment – the more you put into your volunteers, the more you get from them
* Empowering your volunteers is good for them as well as of benefit to you. It allows them to contribute to the organisation and helps them to feel valued. They may also spot things you’ve missed.

You will have, or develop, your own style of supervision, but if you’re new to it, you might like to follow these suggested steps:-

1. Prepare

* What happened at the last meeting?
* Any current issues involving the volunteer
* Any news you wish to give them
* Have you allowed enough time? You must be able to give your volunteer your undivided attention.
* Set the scene. Make sure the space is comfortable, private, and that you won’t be disturbed.

2. Put at ease

Give the volunteer coffee/tea, greet them and briefly chat. Or if your budget allows it, you could take the volunteer to a café or coffee shop, as it may be easier to reflect outside of their volunteering environment, may keep things more informal, and also a bit more special.

3. Explain

An explanation of the process is really useful, especially if this is the first supervision you’ve given the volunteer. Let them know what to expect, and also assure them that this is also their time to highlight any concerns they have or help they need.

4. How is the volunteer?

Ask! Listen!

5. Feedback

* Volunteer’s performance strengths and weaknesses, areas needing improvement, areas to be praised. Discuss these, and any actions needed.
* Organisation news which may need to be explained. A chance for the volunteer to ask questions.

6. Closing

* Agree any action needed to be taken by either of you and agree a time scale.
* Any other points which have come up.
* Book the next supervision meeting.
* Record notes, which may be short, and ask volunteer to read and sign them.
* Don’t assume any problem has been fixed, check with the volunteer that it has.

Regular supervisions with all your volunteers will help you to deal with problems in the early stages, when they are easier to manage. It’s also a chance to praise your volunteers for what they’ve done well or tried hard with.

**A template volunteer induction checklist:**

**[Your Organisation Name]**

**Volunteer Name**:

**Date**:

1. **Welcome**

* Introduce volunteer to other staff and volunteers
* Show where to leave coat, bag and personal belongings
* Show tea and coffee facilities, kitchen and communal areas
* Show where toilets are
* Show where staff notices are displayed
* Show entrance and given access code, if needed

1. **The Tasks**

* Is the volunteer clear about their role and tasks? Is their role description readily available to them?
* The days and hours they are to work?
* Who their supervisor is?
* Who they should refer questions/problems to, if not the supervisor?

1. **Administration**

* Show where to sign in and out, and give any time sheets needed
* Explain how to claim for expenses
* Give badge for wearing on duty, if needed, and where it should be kept, locked, when the volunteer is not on duty
* Explain review/supervision process, and arrange a first date for review

1. **Health & Safety**

* Explain the fire procedure: where fire alarms, exits and extinguishers are
* Shown the volunteer how to record any incident or accident, and where the first aid it is / who the first aider on site is
* Check they know what to do in the event of an incident
* Run through the risk assessment for the volunteer’s role