

Guidelines for organisations involving volunteers



Volunteer Centre Tameside 

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Fundamentals

The practices mentioned in this leaflet are general guidelines and some aspects may not be completely relevant to your organisation. If you have any questions, Volunteer Centre Tameside (VCT) would be very pleased to discuss these with you.

VCT is a 'clearing house'. We do not refer volunteers directly to individual clients or families but to other organisations (either voluntary or statutory) which have special expertise on and responsibilities towards particular client groups and to agencies which involve them.

We forward application forms only from potential volunteers who, in our judgement, seem appropriate for an organisation. The final decision on whether or not they will work together is, of course, the organisation's and the volunteer's. (Please note that we have no systems of checking with the police and do not normally take up references on behalf of other agencies).

It's important to remember that VCT cannot be held responsible for volunteers introduced by us to an organisation. Once accepted. Once accepted by an organisation the volunteer becomes that organisation's legal responsibility.

What can Volunteer Centre Tameside offer local organisations?



- Assistance with recruitment and basic selection of volunteers for a wide range of voluntary and statutory groups.
- Free publicity appealing for volunteers to fill local organisations' requirements - and highlighting new developments - through the national volunteering database, local press, displays and other channels.
- Advice and information on good practices in involving volunteers. VCT has a small selection of books, leaflets and videos on various topics relating to volunteering.
- Support to statutory and voluntary groups working with volunteers and assistance with the development of new projects.
- Organisation of a local Volunteer Organisers' Forum. Regular meetings cover such topics as recruitment, responsibilities to volunteers, selection, screening etc. VCT can also help to organise short courses and provide speakers for various interested groups
- A forum for the discussion of issues affecting volunteers and organisations recruiting volunteers.

Some guidelines on working with volunteers

Planning

- Spend time planning and preparing how, when and where volunteers are going to be working, and who will take overall responsibility for supporting the them.
- Make sure existing staff and/or volunteers feel positive about involving volunteers, are willing to provide support, and understand how to work with them.
- Clearly define volunteers' jobs in agreement with existing staff whose co-operation is essential. Draw up written job descriptions, if only to clarify things in your own mind.
- In situations where the majority of the staff are paid, make sure that the volunteers will not be asked to undertake work which should rightly be done by paid staff. This could lead to difficulties for both staff and volunteers.
- Ensure a safe working environment for volunteers, in compliance with the Health and Safety at Work Act. Even though the Act does not specifically refer to volunteers, organisations should follow the good practices it recommends, e.g. training in safe work procedures, and provision of information about potential hazards.
- Try to ensure that you have sufficient resources to enable volunteers to work effectively e.g. money available for out-of-pocket expenses, office space where necessary, etc.
- Make arrangements for the provision of adequate insurance cover (see Protecting Your Organisation at the end of this leaflet).

Selection

Select with care, giving the initial interview enough time to ensure that the volunteer understands fully what will be expected of him/her.

Make sure that you obtain sufficient information about the volunteer to ensure that their personality, capabilities and availability match the job. An application form can be helpful. If any further checks are needed, get the volunteer's signed consent to obtain these. Examples of such checks might be driving records, health records, and where the work of the agency or the vulnerability of clients demands it, declaration of any criminal record.

VCT strongly recommends that agencies take up references, and considers that this is essential where volunteers are working with children, with people at all vulnerable, where they are going into someone's home, and where confidentiality or money is concerned. In statutory services where a volunteer has substantial access to children, a police check will be carried out - the volunteer's agreement in writing must be obtained.

It is a good idea to offer a trial period in the interests of both the volunteer and your organisation.

If you feel a volunteer is not suitable for the job concerned have the courage to say 'NO'. Try to give clear and honest reasons for your decisions and offer the opportunity for discussion. Suggest possible alternatives - VCT has a wide range of opportunities and may well have a more suitable outlet.

Starting The Job

Ensure that adequate preparation/training is provided and that volunteers are given clear guidance about your organisation's aims and structure, and the role within it. Introduce them to other staff and volunteers.

Try to involve volunteers quickly. If there has to be a delay make sure they know why and for how long.

Try to make sure that the amount of work and level of responsibility is right for each individual - not so much as to be overwhelming or so little as to make the job boring. Use a person's strengths and recognise a volunteer's right to job satisfaction. Volunteers are lost through having too little to do. If you can't keep them busy, suggest that they come back to us for other work.

Check again that the volunteer fully understands the task to be done, the commitment involved, the need to respect confidentiality, and to whom he/she is directly responsible.

Very important is to make sure that someone is responsible for giving time to provide supervision and support to volunteers and that they know when, where and how to contact that person. Provide back-up support to that supervisor.

If they are going into people's homes provide volunteers with identification.

Reimburse out-of-pocket expenses and make it clear to volunteers how to claim these at the outset.

Try to develop a volunteer's contribution by further training where appropriate. Also encourage feedback and sharing of ideas through regular individual/group meetings.

Protecting your organisation, your volunteers and your clients

Your Organisation's Legal Responsibility

VCT strongly advises all agencies to ensure that they have sufficient insurance protection to cover any eventuality.

For example, if a volunteer acts improperly or incompetently when undertaking authorised work, and as a result, someone is injured or property is damaged the organisation may be held legally liable.

Organisations owe a 'duty of care' to volunteers, their clients and to the public.

Volunteers should be covered for personal injury resulting from accidents during the course of their voluntary work, personal injury resulting from physical assault, claims for damages arising from accidents that result in the injury or damage to property and for which the volunteer could be held legally liable and for loss of or damage to their personal property.

Clients should be covered for accident or injury resulting from a volunteer's negligence or assault, loss or damage of their property through a volunteer's actions and any financial loss etc. resulting from a volunteer's misleading advice.

Organisations can minimise the risks by carrying out the practices described in this booklet.

- Take sufficient care in the selection of volunteers
- Clearly define the nature and limits of the volunteers' tasks
- Provide appropriate training or supervision for the safe execution of the task
- Provide a safe working environment, and last but by no means least, **provide adequate, appropriate insurance cover**

Consider the following different claims which could be brought:

- By a volunteer against the organisation
- By a client (or member of the public) against the organisation
- By a client (or member of the public) against an individual volunteer
- By a member of the agency (employee or volunteer) against the individual volunteer

Copies of the following leaflets can be borrowed from the VCT office of the Volunteer Centre UK: *'Protecting Volunteers'* and *'Take Care'* (advice on selecting volunteers).