

NORTH OF TYNE VOLUNTEERING AREA OF EXCELLENCE

DEVELOPING A VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

One of the most valuable resources to help your volunteers operate effectively is the Volunteer Handbook. Either printed or digital, a Volunteer Handbook is an essential guide that clearly states your organisation's mission and how volunteers can help the organization achieve its goals. It basically answers all the questions that a volunteer might have and details what is expected of them as volunteers.

Whilst, as part of the Induction of Volunteers, you may put in place a Volunteer Agreement and/or Volunteer Code of Conduct, there may be documents and policies that you don't have time to go through in detail. A Volunteer Handbook enables you to put all the important information in one place, where it is accessible by all volunteers.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE HEALTH CHECK FOR VOLUNTEER-INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

The Health Check for volunteer-involving organisations considers whether you have a Volunteer Handbook and whether relevant policies and procedures are communicated to all staff and volunteers.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN A VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Consider what roles volunteers play in your organisation and this will help inform what should be included in the Volunteer Handbook. If your volunteers' roles are similar, you can easily structure your handbook so it applies to everyone. If not, you may need a separate handbook for each volunteer position.

The type of content you might want to include in your Volunteer Handbook includes:

1. **Table of Contents:** As most Volunteer Handbooks will contain a lot of information, a table of contents makes it easier for volunteers to find what they're looking for quickly.
2. **Introduction:** You can use the Introduction to set out how much you value your volunteers and to thank them for their commitment and efforts.
3. **Organisation Mission:** If you include your organisation's mission statement in the Volunteer Handbook, it makes it easier for volunteers to understand your organisation and what it stands for and they will be able to carry this through into their volunteering.
4. **The Organisation's Commitment to its Volunteers:** This section can include your commitment to upholding agreed principles for volunteering and supporting the rights of your volunteer (e.g. the right to work in a safe and healthy environment; the right to be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses; the right to have sufficient training to carry out the volunteer role; the right to have access to a grievance procedure etc.)
5. **The Organisation's Programmes and Projects:** Here you can describe the different programmes and projects that your organisation runs, how they run and how they benefit the community. You can also describe how volunteers contribute towards those programmes and projects.

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6. **Roles and Responsibilities of Volunteers:** In this section, you can describe the roles and responsibilities of your volunteers in more detail. Be sure to make it clear what you'll need from the volunteers and what outcomes they might expect.
7. **Volunteer Operations:** This section should provide details about reporting, processes, procedures, and scheduling. For example, specify if volunteers need to check in with the volunteer manager when they arrive. Alternatively, if they have to sign in using volunteer software make that clear. Provide details about how to sign up for their shifts and how to let someone know if they are unable to make it. You can also provide details about any equipment they might need, information on reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses, and how you'll keep in touch and provide ongoing information.
8. **Health and Safety:** Details can be provided about access to First Aid; emergency procedures; reporting of an accident or incident; emergency evacuation of the premises etc.
9. **Volunteer Policies and Requirements:** This section of the Volunteer Handbook should let the volunteers know what you expect from them in terms of work duties and operations. You should also explain any limits on what they can and cannot do as a volunteer, as well as any training required. Where possible, explain why the requirements are in place so that they understand the reasons for what you are asking them to do. Include details of what your organisation's insurance covers them for as well.
10. **Volunteer Code of Conduct:** In this section, specify what principles you expect volunteers to uphold as they work. The Code of Conduct will outline expected professional behaviour and guidelines for working with beneficiaries, staff and other volunteers.
11. **Beneficiary Rights and Responsibilities:** If your volunteers support beneficiaries, you may wish to include a specific section on the expectation that volunteers treat beneficiaries with respect; have the right to privacy and confidentiality; have the right to receive services in ways that meet their individual needs etc. You may also wish to include details of the expectation that beneficiaries treat volunteers with respect, do not discriminate, should not ask volunteers to carry out tasks outside their volunteer role etc.
12. **Training:** In this section, provide details of any training that volunteers must attend and explain why you require the training. Where possible, provide details of timescales for the training sessions. You can also give information about other training that might be open to them as a volunteer with your organisation.
13. **Organisation Policies and Procedures:** In this section, include any policies and procedure that you require the volunteers to read and understand. This might include health and safety requirements, privacy and confidentiality requirements, and safeguarding procedures. information on anything else relevant to the volunteer's role such as information on reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses.

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14. **Staff Directory and Contact Information:** Provide a list of essential contacts in the organisations, including the main contact for volunteering, who to contact if the main contact is not available, and a contact for emergencies. Make sure you provide the contact information you would like volunteers to use — whether phone numbers, email addresses, or both.
15. **Volunteer Agreement:** A copy of the signed Volunteer Agreement completed by the volunteer should be included as written proof that the volunteer agrees to abide by the organisation's guidelines and regulations.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use plain language that is easy to understand and that is not ambiguous.
- Review the Volunteer Handbook on a regular basis to make sure that it is kept up to date.

