

NORTH OF TYNE VOLUNTEERING AREA OF EXCELLENCE

COPYRIGHT AND VOLUNTEER-CREATED MATERIALS

Volunteers often bring creativity and innovation to organisations, but their contributions can also raise important questions about copyright. Understanding and addressing these issues proactively can protect both the organisation and its volunteers while fostering a positive and productive working relationship.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE HEALTH CHECK FOR VOLUNTEER-INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

The Health Check for Volunteer-Involving Organisations considers the extent to which your organisation has policies and procedures in place to work effectively with volunteers.

WHO OWNS THE COPYRIGHT?

Under UK copyright law, creators are the initial owners of copyright for their original works unless a formal agreement states otherwise. Unlike employees, volunteers are not automatically required to transfer copyright to the organisation they support. This means any written works, photographs, videos, or other creative outputs they produce remain theirs unless a written transfer or licence is agreed upon.

ESTABLISHING CLEAR AGREEMENTS

To avoid complications, organisations should develop clear copyright agreements.

Options include:

Deed of assignment: This legally transfers copyright from the volunteer to the organisation, allowing unrestricted use of the material. Templates for such agreements are available and can be adapted to fit the organisation's policies and branding. For example, museums and other heritage organisations commonly use such templates to manage copyright in a structured way.

Licensing agreements: If a volunteer prefers to retain copyright, a licensing agreement can grant the organisation specific rights to use the work while allowing the creator to maintain control over broader uses. This should be non-exclusive and ideally last for the duration of the copyright term.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR LEADERS OF VOLUNTEERS

1. **Communicate clearly:** From the outset, explain the organisation's copyright expectations and how the volunteer's work might be used. Transparency can prevent misunderstandings later.
2. **Incorporate copyright terms:** Add copyright clauses to volunteer agreements or create standalone documents like deeds of assignment. Ensure these are simple, accessible, and legally compliant.
3. **Provide training:** Volunteers creating or using copyright materials should understand copyright basics, including fair dealing, moral rights, and exceptions. Training helps them make informed decisions and avoid unintentional infringement.
4. **Respect volunteer rights:** Even with a copyright assignment, organisations should consider granting volunteers a licence to use their work for personal, non-commercial purposes, such as portfolios or presentations.



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WHY ADDRESSING COPYRIGHT MATTERS

Failing to clarify copyright ownership can lead to disputes or even legal challenges, especially if the organisation modifies or shares volunteer-created materials. Additionally, having robust policies in place can strengthen an organisation's reputation, demonstrating professionalism and respect for creators' rights.

RESOURCES FOR SUPPORT

Many organisations, such as the Collections Trust and Museum Development South West, offer templates and advice tailored to specific sectors. For example, museum managers can download adaptable deeds of assignment or licensing agreements to suit their needs.

For more details and practical tools, consider resources from the [Collections Trust](#) and [Museum Development South West](#).

By taking a proactive and thoughtful approach to copyright, organisations can protect their interests while supporting the creativity and autonomy of their volunteers.

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<https://www.nottinghamcvs.co.uk/>

