

Data Protection

Most volunteer involving organisations hold information on their staff, volunteers and perhaps their clients. This information is likely to be personal data, and therefore subject to the 1998 Data Protection Act which, gives rights to Data Subjects (the people whose data you have) and creates a framework of good practice for those holding personal data. If you collect and hold personal data on individuals, then you are legally required to comply with the Act.

Data Protection Principles

Eight principles are defined to ensure “personal data” is handled properly. The act states that data must be:

1. Fairly and lawfully processed
2. Processed for limited purposes
3. Adequate, relevant and not excessive
4. Accurate
5. Not kept for longer than is necessary
6. Processed in line with the individual’s rights
7. Secure
8. Not transferred to countries without adequate protection

Data protection is the responsibility of all members as well as all staff and agency or contract employees.

If your organisation processes personal data you will have to register with the Information Commissioner's Office unless you are exempt. See www.ico.gov.uk for more information.

Good practice in data collection and storage

The reason for requesting information about volunteers should be fully explained to them. The only data held should be that which is necessary for the volunteer’s involvement with the organisation. Care is needed to ensure that the information collected is adequate and up to date. It should only be used for the purposes for which it was collected. Volunteers should be aware of what information is held, and why. Explicit consent should be asked for the collection, use and storage of sensitive personal information, such as ethnic or racial origin, and physical or mental health.

Information must be kept securely, and access to personal information should be restricted to relevant parties only. Information should only be kept for as long as its original purpose is valid, and in line with data protection and internal human resources guidelines.

When no longer required, information should be destroyed by being shredded by the organisation or returned to the volunteer. Volunteers should be made aware of their rights to view information held by the organisation under the Freedom of Information Act.



Further Information

Information Commission Office -

http://www.ico.gov.uk/for_organisations/data_protection.aspx