

NORTH OF TYNE VOLUNTEERING AREA OF EXCELLENCE

DEVELOPING A VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

A Volunteer Agreement makes it clear what the volunteer can expect from the organisation and what, in turn, the organisation expects from the volunteer. Where possible, the Volunteer Agreement should be specific to the individual volunteer role. It usually sits alongside a volunteer role description and volunteer policy.

Whilst it sets out expectations, an agreement is not a legally binding contract. Because of this, the style of writing should reflect that the organisation hopes a volunteer will act in a certain way, rather than state that they must or have to do so.

As volunteer roles change over time, the agreement should be reviewed to make sure it remains relevant to what they are actually doing.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE HEALTH CHECK FOR VOLUNTEER-INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

The Health Check for volunteer involving organisations considers the extent to which you communicate your policies and procedures to volunteers.

WHY IS A VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT NEEDED?

- It lets the volunteer know that the organisation is committed to their involvement and what they can expect to get out of their volunteering.
- It makes it clear what is expected of the volunteer.
- Volunteers can understand what their rights are. For example, access to induction, support, insurance, expenses, health and safety, equal opportunities, managing any difficulties and training.
- It explains the boundaries between the organisation and volunteers.

VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT VS CODE OF CONDUCT

Whereas a Volunteer Agreement is an informal document that focuses on agreements with an individual specific to their role, allows for reasonable adjustments and details mutual expectations, a Volunteer Code of Conduct is a collective agreement to which all members of a cohort of volunteers agree. A Code of Conduct may cover expectations regarding behaviour, personal responsibilities and team responsibilities, including care for other members of the team.

WHAT SHOULD I INCLUDE IN MY VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT?

Generally a Volunteer Agreement is divided into two key sections: responsibilities of the organisation and expectations of the volunteer. You don't have to include everything, but it is a good idea to use the following as a starting point.

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THE ORGANISATION'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Outline what the volunteer can expect from your organisation;

- Delivery of a full induction to the organisation and any training required for the role;
- Provision of appropriate support and flexibility including training as required;
- Support to enable the volunteer to achieve the standards required, including a named contact for any support/requests/concerns;
- Volunteers will be treated in line with the organisation's equality & diversity policy;
- Any agreed out of pocket expenses incurred during volunteering will be reimbursed;
- Provision of insurance cover for the agreed volunteer role;
- Implementation of good health and safety practice;
- Any problems that may arise during the course of the volunteering will be addressed.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE VOLUNTEER

Outline what you hope for from the volunteer (NB some of this may be covered in a Volunteer Code of Conduct) – that the Volunteer:

- Will perform their role to their best ability;
- Will work as agreed in the volunteer role description;
- Will follow the organisation's volunteer policies and procedures, including health and safety and equality and diversity in relation to its staff, volunteers and anybody with whom they work;
- Will maintain the confidentiality of the organisation and of its clients, customers or service users as appropriate;
- Will honour their commitment as agreed, except in exceptional circumstances when, where possible, reasonable notice is expected;
- Will provide references if required;
- Agrees to appropriate Data Barring Service checks being carried out as required.

Where possible, the agreement should be signed off by a senior member of staff and you should aim to review it on a regular basis to make sure that it stays relevant.

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EXPECTATIONS NOT OBLIGATIONS

Your Volunteer Agreements must avoid sounding like an employment contract. If you treat volunteers like employees, it may make them eligible for full employment rights. You should therefore:

- Steer clear of employment language such as 'job description' or 'employment contract'. Instead choose words such as 'role' or 'task description', and 'volunteer agreement'
- Avoid suggesting obligations in the agreement, such as the requirement to volunteer set hours each week;
- Describe the relationship between your organisation and the volunteer based on hopes and expectations;
- Avoid using language that sounds like a contract, such as 'you must volunteer with us for at least six months';
- Not offer any benefits or perks that might look like payment;
- Only reimburse actual out of pocket expenses on production of a valid receipt. Do not offer standard volunteer expenses payments that do not reflect actual expenditure;
- Only offer training opportunities that are relevant to volunteers' roles within your organisation.

You can also make it clear in the Agreement that it is not intended to form a contract or be legally binding.

