

Good Practice Guides: Developing Further

No. 16 – Supporting Volunteers

Key Points

Volunteers, like most of us, need some form of ongoing support to help them to do their jobs to the best of their abilities. Implementing a good support system will help volunteers claim their rights and carry out their responsibilities within your organisation, and will demonstrate to volunteers that their work and development is important to you. This information sheet will help you create a positive support structure for volunteers.

Why have a support system?

An effective support system will provide a means of tackling problems before they get out of hand. Support is an enabling activity that focuses on the person rather than the task and involves:

- Giving people the space and encouragement to share thoughts and feelings
- Hearing what people say
- Being reliably there for other people
- Increasing the other person's self esteem
- Enabling the other person to cope
- Providing practical assistance

As with most areas of volunteer management, there is no single 'right' way to offer support to volunteers. Different volunteer tasks will require different types of support and you will also need to take into account the differing needs of individual volunteers. For example volunteer management committee or board members will usually need different induction and support from volunteers delivering direct services.

What is important is that an appropriate support system is in place from the beginning of each volunteer's involvement with you. Remember that supporting volunteers includes practical issues such as expenses and making sure volunteers are given up-to-date and comprehensive information.



Ways of offering support

All volunteers should have a named person who will offer on-going personal support that allows them talk through any issues and problems that they have. This can be offered in a variety of ways, including:-

- Regular, pre-arranged one-to-one support sessions
- Informal day-to-day support, e.g. checking in with volunteer at the end of each session
- Telephone support
- Review/development/evaluation sessions at fixed points during the year.
- Getting in touch at key points, e.g. after a potentially stressful session
- Group support – getting volunteers together to share ideas and experiences
- Peer support – using experienced, long-standing volunteers to support new volunteers.
- Training – all volunteers should have the training necessary to equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to carry out their tasks safely and effectively.

The way in which your organisation offers support to volunteers will be determined by a variety of factors, such as the type of organisation, the nature of the volunteer task, the needs of individual volunteers and the resources available. A good support system will incorporate elements of practical, organisational, information and personal support to volunteers. At the start of a volunteer's involvement with the project you should take the time to discuss what they think their support needs will be and what you feel is appropriate to their role and agree on the best method of providing support. Remember that a volunteer's support needs may change during their involvement with you and so it is important to regularly review the way in which support is offered.

More help?

If you would like more help or advice in relation to this factsheet please contact the Volunteer Centre Edinburgh on the following details:

Tel: 0131 225 0630 or Email: admin@volunteeredinburgh.org.uk

Or you can drop in and see us:

Volunteer Centre Edinburgh

45 Queensferry Street Lane
Edinburgh
EH2 4PF
0131 225 0630

www.volunteeredinburgh.org.uk

