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Induction and training for volunteers

Induction and training for volunteers form parts of the same process, the purpose of which is to ensure that volunteers are able to carry out their volunteering role as effectively as possible.

Induction

Induction aims to introduce new volunteers to the organisation and their role in it. This consists of three main parts:

Pre-arrival

This forms part of the recruitment process, and will consist of any information about the organisation and the role that you send the volunteer before they start with you. For example:

- Leaflet or similar about the organisation and what it does
- Volunteer role description
- Contact details and directions and/or map of how to get there

Organisational induction

Explaining what the organisations goals are, and how it goes about achieving them, and helping the volunteers understand where they fit within the organisation as a whole. You might include:

- Background/history of the organisation
- Mission statement
- Services provided and client groups
- Organisation chart
- Talks from paid staff and established volunteers about their roles in relation to volunteers and the organisation as a whole

Local induction

Ensuring that volunteers have a clear understanding of their role and how they will carry it out, as well as site-specific information and guidance on support and supervision mechanisms.

- Health and safety issues e.g. H&S policy, first aid procedures, accident reporting, policy on smoking, emergency exits and evacuation procedures
- Financial issues e.g. how to claim expenses (and what can be claimed)
- Volunteer agreement (what the volunteer can expect from the organisation, and vice versa)
- Arrangements for support and supervision, including if appropriate allocating a key member of staff, mentor or buddy
- Problem-solving procedures (discipline/grievance/complaints)
- Training programme/training needs identification process
- Relevant policies e.g. confidentiality, data protection, phone/internet use

Responsibility for induction sometimes lies within the HR function of a larger organisation, but in a smaller one it might all fall within the remit of the volunteer manager. It's a good idea to try to involve other members of staff or volunteers, if you can, to help deliver specific parts of the process where they have special expertise or interest.

Group v. individual induction

The way you go through the induction process will depend on a number of factors, including the number of volunteers you have starting at the same time and the amount of space you have for group activities. Group induction can take less time overall, and allows for discussions to take place where appropriate. It can also enable volunteers to start to build relationships and provide a support system for each other. On the other hand, if you only have volunteers starting from time to time, it might put them off if they have to wait a while for enough others to join and form a group, so it could be as well to start people one at a time. Some things might be covered more effectively in a group context, such as confidentiality for example, and you may choose to wait and deal with that as part of a specific training session when you have more people to contribute to the discussion.

How much information do I include?

It's important to pace yourself. Don't overwhelm new volunteers with masses of detail on their first day. At the same time, you need to make sure that what they need to know is covered. Just remember that it doesn't all have to happen on the first day. It's a good idea, though, to keep a checklist so that you and the volunteers can keep track of what has been covered and what hasn't. Some organisations use online self-access packages for volunteers to work through at their own pace; an alternative version of this might be using the induction checklist to direct volunteers to various sources of information such as written policies, particular members of staff or online resources such as the organisation's website. How you get the information across is up to you; the important thing is that you make sure that it happens.

Training

The training your volunteers receive will depend entirely on the kind of work they will be doing, and on the numbers of volunteers you need to train at any one time. Initial training may be required to enable the volunteer to carry out their role effectively, and depending on the role may take hours, days or weeks to complete. Ongoing or refresher training may also be

required to keep volunteers skills fresh, or to enable them to develop within the organisation and to take on further tasks.

When developing a training policy you will need to decide what will best meet your organisational requirements, bearing in mind the resources you have at your disposal.

Sitting with Nelly

The most common way of training volunteers and probably the most economical is on the job training. This is most appropriate if you only take on one volunteer at a time, and the work they will be doing is relatively straightforward. A member of staff, or another volunteer, will show the volunteer how to do a task and then supervise them as they do it. This method is effective as long as the person doing the training takes care to make sure the new volunteer really understands what they are meant to be doing, and the volunteer feels able to ask questions without feeling stupid. Its also a good idea to have some written notes for the volunteer to refer back to, if they arent sure of something.

External trainers

A second method is to send volunteers on a training course with a trainer from outside the organisation. This can work either with groups or individual volunteers, as you can either send one or two people on a public open course, or book the trainer to do the course purely for your organisation. This can be an expensive way to buy training, but its worth it if your volunteers need to learn some more complex skills. You can also make it more economical, if you are buying the training in, by letting other local organisations participate, and sharing the cost that way.

To identify appropriate courses or training providers, you will need to do some research in your area. Your local Volunteer Centre may run courses, or have knowledge about other providers in the area. Local further education colleges or adult education centres may offer suitable training opportunities, and are often happy to negotiate specific provision if you have enough participants to make it worth their while. Sometimes they can tap into special funding streams that will help keep your costs low, if your volunteers come from particular groups such as unemployed people, young people or people for whom English is a second language. Private training providers are usually more expensive, but for specialist courses they can be worth it. Ask around, make use of local networks and forums to find out what other organisations are doing you might find that someone else is keen to run something similar, and running something jointly could be more cost-effective.

In-house training

Another method of delivering training is to develop an in-house programme. This works best if you can take on volunteers in groups and you need to train them in fairly complex tasks or ideas. Organisations whose volunteers give legal advice, for example, usually have to devise a fairly rigorous in-house training programme that volunteers need to complete before being able

to work with members of the public. Similarly, where volunteers are working with vulnerable people there will be a need for some fairly in-depth training around areas such as setting boundaries, protection of children or vulnerable adults and confidentiality. These issues are best dealt with in-house so that the examples and case studies used in the training will be relevant and realistic, and so that volunteers concerns will be addressed by people who know the way the organisation works, in-depth. There are lots of good training the trainer courses out there, too, to enable the people delivering the training to keep up to date on current thinking about learning styles and training techniques.

However you decide to address your volunteers training needs, the key is to make sure that it is designed around their roles. Current volunteers can be extremely useful in helping identify the elements in which they feel some formal training would be useful, and they will be able to feed in examples of situations that could form interesting case studies for discussion. Experienced volunteers might even find it interesting to deliver, or at least co-deliver, elements of a training programme for new volunteers

Last Updated May 2009

Our thanks to Volunteering England, author of this information sheet

