



Volunteer Centre
Oxfordshire



Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action

The Old Court House, Floyds Row, St Aldates, Oxford, OX1 1SS
Tel 01865 251946 Fax 01865 204138 E-mail vol@ocva.org.uk www.oxnet.org.uk

Volunteer Inductions

Having a well thought out induction for new volunteers is extremely important. All too often inductions consist of just reading policies and being introduced to staff and then that's it. If properly planned, the induction can be used for both the volunteer and the volunteer coordinator to develop the best ways of working together. Remember that for the first few weeks that they are with you the volunteer will still be making up their mind about whether they want to stay with the organisation. Obviously ideally they will stay, but this period can be quite useful for them to assess whether your organisation is right for them. By using the induction to help them work through this process, you are much more likely to find out about their motivations and end up with a committed, happy volunteer at the end. To make this process easier it can be a good idea to introduce the induction as a trial or taster period. At the end you can both sit down together and talk about how the volunteer feels they are doing, what kind of support they feel they need, any areas where they would like training and which types of work interest them most.

It can be a good idea to talk to the volunteer on their first day about what you hope to cover in their induction period. People can often be very nervous when they start a new volunteer role just as they would be if they were starting a new job. By explaining exactly what they will be doing over the next few weeks you will help to put them at their ease by letting them know what to expect. There is always room for flexibility later on in the induction period when you both know each other better. On their first day you will probably want to keep things very basic. You may want to:

- Introduce them to other staff and volunteers
- Show them round the building; remember to show them where they can put their things, where the toilets are, where they can make themselves something to drink
- Explain who they can go to if they have any questions or problems
- Show them where they will be sitting and where they can find any equipment they need
- Let them know about breaks; can they take one any time they want or do you have set times, where can they go locally if they need to go out, where can they buy food
- Let them know what happens at the end of the day; is there a set time when they leave or is it flexible, do they need to let someone know they are going home
- Explain how they can claim expenses
- Explain your organisation's policy on volunteers using phones/internet for their own use

These are all fairly informal things but they are important because they help the volunteer to feel comfortable; practical things like knowing where the toilet is and where they can make a cup of coffee can help to alleviate awkwardness. Things like policies and procedures may

seem more important but in some ways they are better left until after the volunteer has had all their practical questions answered and feels more relaxed. If you do it this way round you should find that when you get on to more complex things the volunteer feels much more at ease asking you to explain things if they do not fully understand.

There will be some formal things that you need to cover quite early on. It is a good idea to go through any important policies and procedures with the volunteer. It may be tempting just to hand over a file of policies, but by going through them you can make sure that the volunteer understands them and is comfortable with them. It is also good for anyone with limited literacy or English who may otherwise be too embarrassed to ask for help. More formal things that you may want to cover might be:

- Health and Safety - you will probably need to physically show people where the fire exits, fire extinguishers, first aid kit etc. are as well as pointing out any potential hazards
- History, ethos and structure of the organisation - you may not want to cover this in too much detail unless the volunteer is really interested but it is all useful background information
- Volunteer Agreement - this should outline what the volunteer can expect from you and what you expect in return. You will probably want cover how you will train and supervise them, what times you will expect them to come in, what they should do if they can't come in etc.
- Policies - what policies you have will depend on your organisation but you will probably want to cover equal opportunities, confidentiality, and problem solving procedures

The volunteer will have had to take in a lot of information both formal and informal, so you will need to reiterate who they can go to in the organisation to ask questions and where they can find copies of policies etc. Many organisations find it useful to have a volunteer handbook or pack which contains all the information the volunteer needs. When compiling it ask current volunteers what information they would have found useful, and think back to how you felt when you started with the organisation. Beware of making it too large because they probably just won't read it, but try to cover all the basic information they need simply and clearly; you can always signpost them towards where or who they can go to for more information about individual points.

The rest of the induction period will probably be taken up with training and the volunteer trying out the type of work they will be doing. Obviously a lot will be dependent on resources, but if you work closely with the volunteer in this initial period you should be able to gain a much better picture of how they work, what interests them, what support they need and what they are hoping to get out of volunteering for you. In order to let them find out as much as possible about the organisation, you might want to think about: letting them shadow other staff and volunteers, try out tasks in different parts of the organisation, asking them to attend any events the organisation might be involved with and very importantly remember to invite them to any social events that are happening. All this should mean that when you sit down together after their first few weeks both you and the volunteer should be in a better position to talk about their future in the organisation.

Our thanks to Volunteering England, author of this information sheet

