

4. Volunteers

4.22 Managing volunteer exits

It is important that all organisations take responsibility for their volunteer recruitment procedures and have a system for assessing mutual suitability. This is an ongoing process. It means taking care with the application and interview stages, including perhaps DBS / references and induction and also continually reviewing through regular supervision, during the whole period of volunteering.

If a volunteer is not suitable for the roles you offer

A volunteer should never be considered unsuitable on grounds of race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, disadvantage or religion.

Here are some reasons why you might consider applicants / volunteers to be inappropriate for your role(s):

- DBS check indicates they are unsuitable for role - in line with your policy.
- Inability to provide references (if references are required)
- Requiring support that cannot be provided by the organisation
- Receiving ongoing personal support that could indicate unsuitability for the role
- Inability to engage with the required training, or to achieve assessed standards, or to volunteer within the organisation's volunteer policies. This could include inability to meet key policy requirements e.g. behaviour or attitudes which contravene Equal Opportunities and Diversity policy.
- Active drug and alcohol abuse

Your policies/guidelines should make clear how volunteers are assessed to be suitable. Whatever the basis for deciding that a volunteer is not suitable, the process should be fair and transparent and in line with your volunteer policies.

Being 'turned down' for volunteering with a specific organisation might feel like rejection and may have serious consequences for the volunteer. The whole process needs to be conducted in a sensitive, but clear and respectful manner.

Counselling Out

Counselling out is the process of agreeing that a volunteer will not be placed within your organisation. The volunteer should be given clear and honest reasons for not being able to start volunteering with your organisation. They should not be given an excuse (e.g. 'the project is 'full up' at the moment'). Consider having a Counselling Out policy in place, to include:

- Reference to selection procedures
- Counselling out procedures
- Situations where volunteers may be refused the opportunity to volunteer with the project
- An identified individual who will conduct the procedure
- A statement confirming that volunteers will be given clear and honest reasons for not being able to continue.
- Best practice guidelines for staff conducting counselling out interviews.

If during the selection process you have gut feelings or intuitions about a volunteer, don't necessarily ignore them, but make sure that they are not the result of personal prejudices.

Ask yourself the following:

- What exactly triggered the negative feelings?
- Was your concern triggered by any inconsistencies in the information the volunteer gave as part of the selection process,
- Did the individual clearly understand your expectations?
- What areas of the induction assessment criteria has the individual failed to meet?

Always:

- Get a second opinion from a colleague
- Make further checks, e.g. take up another reference, hold a second interview or ask the individual to attend further training
- Interviewers should use best practice in giving feedback including the following:-
 - Emphasising the volunteer's positive attributes
 - Checking understanding
 - Asking the volunteers own opinions

Letting Volunteers Go

A 'Letting volunteers Go' policy will guide and support you when deciding whether a volunteer should be asked to leave the project. This should not be referred to as a disciplinary procedure and needs to be separate to procedures for employed staff, since the relationship you have with volunteers has a different basis from that with paid staff.

The policy could include:

- situations where a volunteer would automatically be asked to leave the organisation
- exploring alternatives to leaving – retraining, adapting the role, additional support and supervision
- how concerns or complaints will be investigated
- warning systems
- appeals process

If the volunteer is asked to leave, or chooses to leave the organisation, refer them back to local Volunteer Centre. Explain that there may be other more suitable opportunities for them.

When a volunteer wants to end their volunteering

Volunteers' circumstances often change, preventing them from continuing with their role and volunteers often move on to further volunteering or paid work elsewhere. It should be made clear to volunteers that they can end at any time.

Whilst it is always sad to see volunteers move on, maybe you could recognise that it was your organisation that gave them the opportunities, skills, knowledge and confidence needed to achieve their goals. Celebrate this and let them know their contribution has been appreciated. If possible, provide them with a reference, and a certificate or thank you letter.

Your volunteer centre should be able to further help you with developing your policies and procedures.

Further Information

The [Investing in Volunteers Standard](#) requires that volunteers are informed if their application is unsuccessful, are offered feedback and signposted to other organisations as appropriate (Indicator 6.5). Also that volunteers leaving the organisation, who have made regular commitment to it, are offered a reference and/or other statement of achievement (Indicator 9.4)

See also Information sheet [4.15 Placing hard to reach volunteers](#)

Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

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