

Volunteer Agreements and Handbook

There are arguments both for and against using a volunteer agreement and no recommendation is being made. Many organisations choose to use a formal document as a means of recording expectations, relationship and any agreed availability between themselves and a volunteer.

If used, it should be two-way (volunteer and organisation) - detailing what they can expect of the other. The agreement is not a contract, neither is it legally binding and care should be taken not to imply either. Terminology and words used should not indicate or reference a potential cross over into what can be viewed as a contract, employment legislation or employment rights for example 'contract', 'terms and conditions', 'job' 'binding'.

If you do use an agreement you may wish to call it something else for example 'Volunteer Guidance', 'Volunteer Guidelines', 'Volunteer Expectations' or 'things to know' etc.

Reasons for and against using an agreement

For:

- Provides a written understanding of the relationship between the volunteer and the organisation
- Clearly sets out what the volunteer can expect from the organisation
- Seeks to ensure that the volunteer understand the organisations and role expectations

Against:

- Risk that the agreement terminology may be interpreted as a contract, potentially bringing volunteers under employment legislation
- The information may be duplicated, such as the Volunteer Policy or handbook
- As the agreement is not binding, it may be of limited use

Typical contents in an agreement

- Provide a written description of the volunteer's role
- Provide a full induction and any training necessary for the role
- Provide a named person the volunteer can go for support
- Reimburse out of pocket expenses
- Provide a safe working environment
- Treat volunteers in line with its equal opportunities policy
- Provide insurance cover for volunteers

What volunteers might be expected to do under an agreement

- Volunteer within the policies and procedures of the organisation including health and safety, equal opportunities and confidentiality
- Volunteer within the boundaries of their role description
- Honour the availability offered, letting the organisation know if they are unable to volunteer for any reason

Signing Agreements

Think about why you would be asking volunteers to sign an agreement. It would be a reasonable question to ask: if you do not intend it be a binding document, then why do you need signatures?

Some organisations like to have signed agreements. In such cases it is doubly important to ensure that it is clear the agreement is intended to be binding in honour only. To avoid

creating something that resembles a contract of employment, you may wish to include the following wording in any agreement:

“This agreement is not intended to be a legally binding contract between us and may be cancelled at any time at the discretion of either party. Neither of us intend any employment relationship to be created either now or at any time in the future.”

Is a volunteer handbook an alternative to a volunteer agreement?

Yes – *it can be*. This guidance has already mentioned that the information within a volunteer agreement may be duplicated in other places such as volunteer policy or handbook.

A handbook can contain all the information needed for a volunteer in one place - avoiding confusion of where the relevant documents are and being referred to during recruitment, induction and their time with the organisation. It can be seen as more welcoming than an agreement, as brings a sense of feeling more valued due to the time taken to create what is important for volunteers which is often more than just about their role and expectations.

You can be as creative as you want including photos, images, activities, links to films/videos, useful resources etc. reflecting the organisation culture and value of volunteering and doesn't have to include large amounts of information. Remember - is it accessible for all, is it in a format for all to understand, is it clear and concise etc.

As well as what would have been in the agreement, the handbook can also include:

- Welcome message from CEO and/or Trustees/Directors
- Information about the organisation, including values and mission – about us
- List of key contacts/organisational chart
- Volunteer policy
- Your commitment to Equity, Inclusion and Diversity
- Photos of staff and/or volunteers
- Problem solving/what to do if they have any concerns
- Relevant policies and procedures
- Health and safety
- Data protection, GDPR and confidentiality
- How they can provide feedback
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)
- Support provided including Supervisions/1-2-1's/Team meetings
- Development opportunities
- Boundaries of the volunteer role/volunteering
- How you value and recognise volunteers
- Leaving volunteering

The above list is not exhaustive and not everything is needed. These are just suggestions to considered and tailored to your organisation and volunteers needs.

Some organisations ask volunteers to sign their handbook to say they have read and understand the content.

