



Support and Supervision

1. Introduction

Ideally all volunteers should receive regular support and supervision sessions. The form this takes will vary from role to role and from volunteer to volunteer. Some volunteers may need a little more help and support, perhaps due to a disability or mental health problem. Some volunteers may need a little extra training or in-role coaching. Other volunteers may lack confidence, and need reassurance they are doing things correctly.

2. Forms of support

Informal support

It is likely that a considerable amount of support will happen on an informal basis – perhaps over the kettle when making a cup of tea or in a phone conversation when rostering or organising an activity. Having an open door policy can allow volunteers to access your support whenever they feel they need it.

You should however also consider offering:

A one-to-one meeting

For many volunteers a one to one meeting will be the best way of ensuring they get a chance to give and receive feedback. A meeting offers the chance for an open two way conversation and a structured programme of regular one to one meetings ensures no one is left out.

The frequency of one to one meetings will depend on your programme of activity and the amount of time your volunteers contribute. Whatever your structure, it is important that your volunteers know what to expect and that coming along to meetings is part of what you hope they will contribute to your organisation.

You may like to consider how you describe these meetings – support has *soft* overtones, whereas supervision can be seen as task related and may be a bit off putting. People may have the appraisal workplace model in their head so it is important to reassure volunteers that it is as much a chance for you to listen as it is for you to talk.

Arrange a private space for the meeting.

Start by asking how they are, and if you are aware of anything specific in their private life ask about it. Try to put them at ease and make them feel valued for their contribution; think of something specific that you can praise them for.

Move onto the main purpose of the meeting. Some obvious questions to ask are:

- What has gone well?
- What has not?
- Have their reasons for volunteering / continuing to volunteer changed at all? What are their future aspirations? (This is about ensuring you continue to meet their motivation to volunteer)
- Are there any other tasks within the organisation they would like to be involved with?
- Do they feel they have any support or training needs, or things they would like to access for their own personal development?
- Are there any changes they would like to see happen in their role or within the organisation?
- Do they have any problems or concerns?

If there are problems about the volunteer's work or behaviour do not be afraid to raise them. The problem is the behaviour not the individual, so you can phrase the issue as a shared problem - discussing what steps you need to take together to improve things (see Volunteer Information Sheet 11: *What to do when things go wrong* for further details).

Good feedback should be **SNIPP**:

- **S**pecific
- **N**eutral
- **I**mmEDIATE
- **P**rivate
- **P**ractical

Thank the volunteer for coming along, make note of any action points and make sure that these are followed up. If asking the volunteer just to come in for a one-to-one meeting is impractical you might like to consider how you can offer individual support by:

- phone or skype
- as part of group support or peer support sessions
- via self-feedback using a questionnaire; or
- as part of group training sessions or social gatherings.

3. How to retain volunteers

Recruiting, inducting, training, supporting and supervising the work of volunteers takes time and resources. Below are some steps you can also take to make volunteering with your organisation such a rewarding experience that it's more likely someone will want to stay with you.

Create Rewarding Volunteer Roles

When creating volunteer role descriptions consider what you are hoping the volunteer will do. Is there anything in the role that would help to attract and keep volunteers? Is there a chance to learn new skills or meet new people? What could the role offer a volunteer in the medium to long term?

Ideally the role will be flexible enough to allow adaptation to suit an individual and give someone joining the organisation some say over the role they are coming into. Once a volunteer is established, it's a good idea to offer an opportunity for further discussion about their role. It may be that they are looking for a new challenge or that they have found something isn't quite as they expected. If possible, see how changes can be made to their role. (See Volunteer Information Sheet 5: [Volunteer Role Descriptions](#) for further details)

Appoint a Volunteer Supervisor

If your organisation does not have a paid volunteer supervisor, some volunteers relish the opportunity of taking on additional responsibilities and may find it rewarding to take on a volunteer supervisor role. If you think this might have the potential to cause disruption and discontent amongst other volunteers, consider why you think the person is suitable for the role – for example the person may have had longer experience, extensive management experience or given a more regular commitment to the organisation.

Motivation

Look at the reasons why people do (and don't) volunteer. This is always helpful when recruiting and thinking about volunteer retention. Whilst volunteers may not be financially paid, there will be something they are hoping to gain from their experience.

It helps to be aware of a volunteer's initial and ongoing motivation. If someone comes into an organisation because they want to be involved in something specific and then end up doing something completely different without being made aware of the reason for any change, they may feel discontented or unhappy. Volunteer's motivations can also change, which makes regular communication with volunteers very important. Talking to volunteers, both informally and as part of one-to-one support meetings, offers an opportunity to find out more about their motivations, and can offer an opportunity to shape their role to continue meeting their needs and interests.

Recognition

Volunteers are an important part of any volunteer-involving-organisation and it's important that their contribution is acknowledged and their achievements recognised.

There are many ways of making volunteers feel involved, valued and recognised:

- Involve them in decisions about the day-to-day running of the organisation.

- At events, particularly if they celebrate achievement, acknowledge the work of your volunteers
- Include your volunteers in staff discussions and staff training where appropriate
- Add volunteer names to staff lists, making sure they are labelled as volunteers. You will also need to ask their permission if this information is shared publicly, for example on a website
- Put them forward for volunteer awards - locally, regionally and nationally.
- Perhaps think about volunteer recognition awards inside your own organisation
- Offer Volunteer Thank You events – at Christmas and/or as part of Volunteers Week
- Make and present certificates – either as a once a year thank you, or after a fixed term
- Offer accredited training opportunities
- Invite volunteers on to working groups to review and comment on things, for example the volunteers' handbook
- Send them a card for key celebrations or for their birthday.

Always

- Say thank you when they leave at the end of their volunteering day
- Make sure they have enough engaging and meaningful tasks to do during their volunteering.

Volunteer Get-togethers

Whilst you may already programme group support sessions or volunteer meetings, make sure there are opportunities for social occasions. Socialising, meeting new people and making friends are often important motivational factors for volunteers. Some groups programme specific social events for volunteers, others include *social time* within group support and volunteer meetings.

Keep in Touch - Volunteer Newsletters

Sometimes organisations lose volunteers because the volunteer feels out of touch with what's happening in the organisation. Some people may only volunteer occasionally. Sending out a regular newsletter or e-bulletin can help people feel like they belong. You may like to include organisational news, pieces of information and perhaps some *fun* elements (quizzes, light-hearted articles etc.) and also to highlight the contribution your volunteers have made. Most volunteers will have access to emails and the internet but don't forget to post out or make available a copy to those who don't.

Good Practice

The more respect you can show your volunteers, the happier they will feel about the organisation they are donating their time to. Key things to bear in mind are clarity and consistency. Volunteers like to know where they stand. You can help to achieve this by:

- Fully inducting volunteers
Offering a settling in period with review
- Making and keeping volunteers aware of their rights and responsibilities (this may be through a code of practice or guide)
- Having a volunteer policy and agreement in place
- Having a named supervisor to go to
- Offering clear problem solving procedures
- Considering equal opportunities and diversity

Exit Interviews

If a volunteer does decide to move on, or you are worried about a high turnover of volunteers, it's a good idea to talk to volunteers who are leaving either through a questionnaire or an informal chat (it is perhaps better if it is not an immediate supervisor doing this!).

Exit interviews are a useful tool for monitoring your approach to volunteers. People leaving the organisation are likely to be more candid than they would otherwise be. In a work situation most people leave because of the working conditions, the work itself, management procedures or relationships with colleagues.

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