

BCAN Homeless Forum Guidelines Working with Volunteers

Volunteers and the Law

It is an agreement – each party gains something – but there is no commitment.

- Don't mention the 'contract' word (think in terms of gift and choice)
- You have obligations to them (and you are responsible for what they do)
- They have obligations to you (but you have to manage them properly)
- Health and Safety (manage risks to the volunteers, and risks caused by them)
- Insurance (make sure your insurer knows about your volunteers)
- Use of cars (they must not drive for you if they are not insured)
- Availability for work (there may be limits on what they are allowed to do)

It is *not* an employment contract.

- Volunteering is a gift – it is always voluntary (you have no assurance of reliability, but a promise is okay)
- It is always voluntary on both sides (they don't have to work for you, you don't have to take on anyone who offers)
- It is always unpaid (no reward, but reimbursed expenses are okay)

Volunteers and your Project

Think first: why use volunteers?

- It is easier to do the job yourself (you need to be clear what you will get out of it; volunteers can do things paid staff cannot do)
- It must be satisfying (you need to be clear what they will get out of it)
- It must be fair (you need clear relationships between volunteers and employees)

'Volunteer' is a pay grade, not a job title.

- Volunteers need to know what they are doing and why
- A volunteer is not just someone to fill in the gaps, the jobs employees don't want to do

A volunteer is not a free worker.

- Don't use volunteers to save money by replacing paid workers
- Volunteers cost time and money, they must be managed and supported
- Volunteers can't be told what to do, they have to choose to do it each time

Volunteer Essentials

Working with volunteers involves the following key areas.

1. Organisational context
2. Legal framework
3. Job description
4. Terms and conditions
5. Application
6. Vetting
7. Induction
8. Policies and procedures
9. Management
10. Support
11. Conflict resolution
12. Review

Volunteer Resources

Working with volunteers is not easy – so get help.

- Volunteering England <http://www.volunteering.org.uk>
- Volunteer Bristol (resources, guidelines, check lists) <http://www.volunteerbristol.org.uk>
- NCVO (policy issues, strategy) <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk>
- NCVO (workforce wheel) <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/ncvo-workforce-wheel.pdf>
- BCAN (local help from the Bristol Christian Action Network) <http://www.bcan.org.uk>
- Nonprofit Risk Management Center (American, but most of the material and principles are equally applicable this side of the pond) <http://www.nonprofitrisk.org/>

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