Volunteering pack

Volunteer management
This document looks at the role of volunteer manager and some of the issues that may arise as part of that role, including problem solving, reimbursement and providing support after a stressful event.

## Volunteer management

Good quality volunteer management, coordination and support are essential for encouraging a diverse range of people to volunteer and to ensure that the input they provide is safe and contributes positively to patient care.

Volunteers who are both well managed and supported are more likely to stay with an organisation, building their skills and knowledge and contributing to effective and value-for-money services. Good volunteer management also ensures that risk is managed effectively.

With increasing numbers of volunteers in the NHS, those organisations that recruit directly can no longer afford to be complacent about their management. There is an increasing need for volunteer managers to work with, and develop the skills of, other managers across the organisation who are in a position to identify potential volunteer roles and to take some responsibility for day-to-day supervision.

Managing volunteers effectively requires an understanding of each individual’s motivation and the kind of role that might prove beneficial to both the organisation and the individual. This is particularly important for volunteers who face additional barriers to getting involved, such as disabled people, people with learning disabilities, those with experience of mental ill health or from LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) or BME (black and minority ethnic) communities.

These attributes may be part of the individual’s motivation for volunteering in the healthcare sector but they will not necessarily be the things that define their capability or area of interest as a volunteer. Stereotypes should be avoided.

Good volunteer managers fit roles around individuals – rather than individuals into roles – and use the experience of existing volunteers to support those who are new to a role.

## Involving senior managers

The Strategic vision for volunteering calls for leaders in the NHS to take up the volunteering agenda and to champion volunteering within their own organisation and the wider community.

It looks to boards to consider how volunteering can help build better links with the local community, for clear accountability on agreed actions and priorities and to support the necessary cultural change needed to integrate volunteering more fully into their organisations.
Voluntary services manager/coordinator role

Not all NHS trusts employ a voluntary service manager (VSM) or coordinator (VSC). However, more and more trusts appreciate the need to employ someone who has an in-depth understanding of the unique and complex issues that recruiting and working with volunteers can involve.

A voluntary service manager/coordinator is usually responsible for recruiting volunteers, as well as having the following responsibilities:

- developing a trust policy for volunteers
- working in partnership with the staff in the organisation to develop volunteer roles
- working with HR to recruit volunteers – this depends on the organisation and many trusts keep volunteer recruitment separate
- meeting the training needs of volunteers, including inductions for new volunteers
- working with the trust directors, other managers and funders to negotiate, develop and implement contracts and funding
- carrying out risk assessments for volunteer tasks
- developing and providing new services, where appropriate, to meet identified needs
- liaising and working with partner organisations; developing and agreeing partnership agreements
- providing written reports, statistics and other important information to the director, funders and/or management committee, about ongoing and future projects
- working with local volunteer councils to broker volunteers and support local initiatives for community involvement.

Raising concerns

The Government expects NHS bodies to have a whistleblowing policy in place, in line with the requirements of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

While this Act does not directly extend to non-executive directors, volunteers or self-employed individuals, as members of the public they may feel the need to raise concerns that would fall under a trust whistleblowing policy if they were employees.

Managers with responsibility for volunteers should be aware of this and be prepared to take the necessary action if concerns are raised with them in the first place.
Support after a stressful or traumatic event

Occasionally a volunteer may be involved in, or witness, an event that they find stressful or traumatic, and find that they need support or counselling. This can range from the death of a patient or service user to a violent or distressing incident. Whatever the situation, it is good practice to have a framework in place to support volunteers through their distress. Trusts will already have a policy in place to support staff and this policy can be used to support volunteers when required. Volunteering England has a policy designed to deal with bereavement only – for more information, visit: www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/goodpracticebank/Information/bereavement

Reimbursement

Volunteers should not be financially worse off as a result of their involvement and should be encouraged to accept reimbursement of their expenses. Expenses should be reimbursed against receipts and should always be for the exact amount spent. If rounded up, they could be classed as earnings and as such could affect benefits entitlement and be subject to tax. Volunteers receiving benefits or on restricted incomes may require immediate reimbursement or payment in advance of out-of-pocket expenses.

Some organisations will consider reimbursement of care expenses if a reasonable request is made. This demonstrates a commitment to equal opportunities and helps to reduce financial barriers to new and potential volunteers who may be unable to volunteer because of financial and carer commitments. Click here for more information.

More details about reimbursement can be found in the following report:

Problem solving

There may be times when problems arise with a volunteer which, under other circumstances, would be addressed through a grievance procedure. However, grievance and disciplinary policies for paid staff can be formal in their language and tone and using the same policy for volunteers and staff is not recommended. A policy written for volunteers should use clear language and the term ‘problem solving procedure’ helps to differentiate it.

Volunteers have the same legal rights as the general public (for example, health and safety and data protection), but they are not covered by employment legislation. Having a problem solving policy specifically for volunteers helps to ensure that volunteers are treated fairly, are not discriminated against, understand how to complain, and what their rights are if a complaint is made against them. It also creates consistency and demonstrates the organisation’s commitment to volunteering good practice.

It should be a written policy that sets down each stage of the process, ensuring that complaints are resolved in an open and fair manner and without delay. This will help to:

- protect volunteers
- minimise any disruption to staff, service users and other volunteers
- demonstrate that the organisation respects its volunteers
- protect the reputation of the organisation.

Important points to remember

- Early discussions may prevent the problem-solving process starting.
- Treat all complaints confidentially, and only discuss them with those who are directly involved in trying to resolve the issue.
- It is a good idea to include a policy on storing complaints and warnings on file. If you do, you need to decide how long they will be kept on record. This should comply with the Data Protection Act 1998: [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/ukpga_19980029_en_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/ukpga_19980029_en_1)
- Meetings should be conducted where you will not be interrupted and out of view of colleagues. Ensure that enough time is allowed for everyone to be able to put forward their point of view comfortably.
- Keep complainants informed at every step of the procedure.
- Set realistic timeframes for people to make complaints, and for the organisation to respond.
- If the person making the complaint is a service user, they should be reassured that their complaint will not affect their right to use the services of the trust. Service user volunteers should still be able to use the trust services, unless they are suspended while an investigation into an act of gross misconduct is carried out.
• Volunteers should be allowed to be accompanied by a colleague, friend or trade union representative in any meetings that form part of the problem-solving process. However, the person who accompanies them cannot act in a legal capacity at this meeting.

• The organisation’s human resources department should be included in the problem-solving procedure.

• It is good practice to consult with staff-side representatives, volunteer groups and HR colleagues when developing a problem-solving procedure.

• Review your problem-solving procedures regularly to ensure that they are working effectively.

• Evaluate your procedures against any cases undertaken, asking what went well or not so well. What could have been done to prevent a complaint being made?

If a volunteer makes a complaint

If a volunteer feels that they have been unfairly treated, or if they have an issue or a cause for concern within the organisation, they should feel able to complain and have access to information which tells them how to do so.

Stage 1: Oral complaint

The first stage of the process is an oral complaint – this may be against a member of staff, the organisation or another volunteer and should be discussed with the volunteer. If the complaint is about the volunteer manager, the matter should be referred to another manager. This person can be named in the problem-solving procedure. If the volunteer wishes, they can be accompanied by a nominated person of their choice, but this person cannot act in a legal capacity. If the problem cannot be resolved by discussion then the process moves on to stage 2.

Stage 2: In writing

If a satisfactory conclusion was not reached at stage 1, the volunteer should make a formal written complaint to a more senior member of staff. This person should be named in the organisation’s problem-solving procedures. There should be a set timeframe within which the volunteer can make the formal complaint and, following on from this, the organisation should also set a timeframe in which the person nominated to deal with the complaint will respond in writing. This may be a holding response/acknowledgement while an investigation into the complaint takes place. If this is the case a timeframe should be set to resolve the matter.

If the volunteer feels that the outcome is not satisfactory at this stage then they may appeal against the decision to a member of the management committee or trust board, depending upon what your organisation has in place.
Opportunity to appeal

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome, they can appeal to a member of the management committee/trust board, usually the chair. Some organisations prefer to form a sub-committee specifically to deal with complaints. The volunteer can have a nominated person present at this meeting, again they cannot act in a legal capacity. The chair or sub-committee will need to respond within a specified time, and their decision is final. Volunteers have no legal rights unless they can prove that they are in fact employees, or that the organisation has been negligent in its duty of care towards them.

Complaints about a volunteer

Occasionally, issues can arise during the course of volunteering. It may be that a volunteer is not fitting into the team as well as was expected, not meeting the required standards when undertaking tasks, or being unreliable. This type of issue is usually detected during regular supervision sessions and is often quite easy to resolve without resorting to formal procedures.

Regular supervision and review can help to identify issues before a complaint is made. The following things can also help to prevent a situation or issue which may lead to a complaint developing.

- **Induction pack** – this outlines the organisation’s volunteer policy and the volunteer’s role description. This should provide the volunteer with a good understanding of what is required of them in their volunteering role, and their behaviour in the healthcare setting. However, a volunteer may still need to be reminded of the volunteer policy and ground rules within the organisation.

- **Training** – check if the volunteer has training needs, has received the correct training or has properly understood the training they have received. Everyone learns at a different pace and in a different way. Consider whether the training materials need adapting, or if there are changes that need to be made to the way training is delivered.

- **Support and line management** – does the volunteer need extra support or line management?

- **Role** – is the volunteer feeling fulfilled in their current role, have their needs changed, or would they like to use different skills to help the organisation?

- **Health** – is the volunteer suffering from ill health or burnout, or finding it difficult to cope with the demands of the role? They may need a break from volunteering, or may prefer to volunteer in another organisation as part of a volunteer swap.

- **Retirement** – at some point the volunteer may feel ready to retire from volunteering altogether. If a volunteer does decide to leave, thanking them for their contribution demonstrates that they are valued and enables them to leave with honour.

If a complaint has been made about a volunteer, the process followed should be similar to when a volunteer makes a complaint.
Stage 1: Oral discussion

The first step is to discuss the complaint with the volunteer. There could be a number of factors influencing their ability to carry out tasks, their behaviour or their attitude. Identify goals that will help the volunteer to fulfil their role, and offer extra support, supervision and training where necessary. Agree a deadline for reviewing the situation with the volunteer. If the volunteer wishes they may be accompanied by a nominated person at any of these meetings, but this person may not act in a legal capacity.

If the complaint was raised by a third party, keep them informed of the measures you are taking to rectify the situation. If you would prefer the complaint to be put in writing, then state this in your problem-solving procedure.

Stage 2: Written warning

If the issue is still unresolved after the oral discussion and the review, the volunteer manager can issue the volunteer with a written warning outlining the reason for the complaint. The volunteer should be given the opportunity to state their case, which could be to either the volunteer manager or a senior member of staff. The volunteer should also be allowed to be accompanied by a person of their choice. Depending on the nature of the complaint, further objectives could be set and help offered to the volunteer. If the organisation decides to ask the volunteer to leave, then they should be given the opportunity to appeal. The decision to ask a volunteer to leave should be a last resort.

Stage 3: Opportunity to appeal

If a volunteer has been asked to leave then they may appeal in writing to a member of the management committee or trust board, usually the chair. Some organisations prefer to form a sub-committee specifically to deal with complaints. The volunteer should be invited to have a nominated person present at this meeting. The chair or sub-committee will need to respond within a specified time, and their decision is final.
Volunteer exit procedures

Once the process has reached the point where there is no alternative but to ask the volunteer to leave, it is good practice to have a process in place.

- Be clear about how you are going to approach the situation, and be prepared for how they are likely to react.

- It is a good idea to involve HR in this process, either by seeking their advice or by asking for their support in the exit interview.

- Make sure that the meeting takes place in a confidential setting, where you are unlikely to be disturbed, and which is not open to general view.

- Expect the volunteer to express their emotions, they will naturally be upset – keep your emotions in check and stay calm.

- You should follow up the meeting with a letter to reiterate the decision. Outline the reasons for asking them to leave and include any information relating to their departure.

- You should inform staff, clients and other volunteers of the outcome, but do not give reasons for the volunteer’s departure.

- If the volunteer had responsibilities for certain clients, make sure that the clients are informed that a new volunteer that will be assigned to them.

Exceptions

Occasionally it will be necessary to suspend a volunteer with immediate effect while an investigation is carried out. Generally this would be because they have committed an act that constitutes gross misconduct, such as theft, assault, an act of violence, malicious damage, fraud, harassment or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

The decision to suspend a volunteer will need to be confirmed in writing to the volunteer and, in some instances, legal proceedings may need to be concluded before the next step of the problem-solving procedure can take place.

Volunteer service managers/coordinators should refer to their immediate line manager and their HR department, who will support them through the process.
Flowchart 1 – volunteer makes a complaint

A complaint is made against a volunteer

Stage 1: Oral discussion
- Attempt to resolve issue by discussion
- Note discussion
- Set timetable for review

Complaint not resolved

Complaint resolved
- No further action needed

Stage 2: In writing
- Volunteer makes a formal complaint in writing
- Complaint is acknowledged in given timeframe
- Investigation takes place
- Discuss outcome with volunteer
- Volunteer informed of right to appeal if they are unhappy with outcome

Volunteer not satisfied with the outcome/decision

Stage 3: Right to appeal
- Volunteer appeals within given timeframe
- Appeal is heard
- Outcome is final

Please note:
At all stages of this procedure the volunteer should have the right to have a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, present if they wish.
A complaint is made against a volunteer

Stage 1: Oral discussion
- A complaint is made against the volunteer
- Note outcome of discussion with volunteer
- Agree course of action and review

Insufficient improvement

Stage 2: Written warning
- Volunteer is advised in writing that insufficient improvement has been made
- Complaint investigated and course of action decided upon
- Volunteer informed of proposed course of action, verbally and in writing
- Volunteer informed of right of appeal if they disagree

Volunteer not satisfied with the outcome/decision

Stage 3: Right to appeal
- Volunteer appeals within given timeframe
- Appeal is heard
- Outcome is final

Performance/conduct of volunteer improves
- No further action needed
- Document outcome of review

Please note:
At all stages of this procedure the volunteer should have the right to have a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, present if they wish.