Fact sheet 4c: Support and supervision for volunteers

Support and supervision are key tools for managing and motivating volunteers. Whilst they are often taken to mean the same thing, they are in fact different:

**Support** focuses on the volunteer and what they need on a personal level to stay motivated and interested in their volunteering activities.

* **Supervision** is largely concerned with overseeing the tasks and responsibilities of the volunteer role. Good supervision involves finding an effective balance between the needs of the volunteer and the needs of the organisation.

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# Volunteer Support

Because volunteers are not paid, they will stay only if they feel enthusiastic and motivated. Providing good support will keep your volunteers happy while helping to ensure that your volunteers’ energy and enthusiasm is harnessed to benefit your organisation.

Volunteers are more likely to stay if they:

* Feel appreciated and recognised by your organisation
* Are used effectively and can see that their work is needed
* Feel that they are doing something worthwhile and that they make a difference
* Have the flexibility to be able to change or develop their role or commitment if they want to do so
* Have opportunities to learn, develop skills and grow on a personal level
* Feel confident that they can handle the tasks they are asked to do
* Are adequately supported and supervised
* Have a sense of belonging, being part of a team and have opportunities to socialise with others
* Are consulted about their work and have the opportunity to contribute to policy and decision making
* Are accepted and supported by other volunteers and paid staff
* Feel that their personal needs and motivations are being met.

Volunteers are likely to leave if they:

* Are subject to changes without proper explanation or notice
* Feel unappreciated or taken for granted
* Have too many demands placed on them or on their time
* Have lots of empty hours
* Are asked to do things they don’t feel equipped or qualified to handle
* Have unrealistic or unclear expectations of their role
* End up out of pocket
* Don’t enjoy what they do or feel that their work isn’t valuable
* Feel that their time is being wasted or their work is badly organised
* Feel isolated.

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# Ways of supporting volunteers

Volunteer coordinator adopts an ‘open door’ approach

## This is a very convenient approach for volunteers, but does make it difficult for the volunteer coordinator to manage her or his time. Problems can also arise if several volunteers arrive at the same time, a few assertive volunteers begin to dominate the volunteer coordinator’s time, or quieter, less assertive volunteers do not make use of this approach. For this reason many organisations will limit this approach to just mornings, for example. This approach works best alongside structured reviews for volunteers, to make sure that every volunteer has time with the volunteering coordinator.

Specific session times when the coordinator is available to volunteers

This approach aims to maintain flexibility and availability whilst enabling the volunteer coordinator to manage his or her working day more efficiently. A booking sheet can be provided for volunteers to write their names next to slot times. A drawback of this approach is that the specific session times may not match certain volunteers’ shift times. This might necessitate the volunteer making an additional trip to meet the approach is that the specific session times may not match certain volunteers’ shift volunteer coordinator, which may not be very convenient for the volunteer. Finding a way to be available to meet such volunteers during their shifts might be a necessary compromise for the success of this approach.

Regular contact via telephone calls, e-mails, Zoom, texts or instant messenger

This is an especially useful method for volunteers who are based in different locations to the volunteer coordinator, have outreach roles or who volunteer from home. If it’s possible, it is helpful to arrange periodic face to face contact in order to ensure that the volunteer feels part of the organisation’s working community. If the volunteer is unable to meet face to face, a service such as Skype is the next best thing. This might sound unlikely, but volunteer bloggers and social media assistants might well work in different towns, counties or even countries!

Volunteer group meetings

## Group meetings allow volunteers to share ideas and opinions, but can be dominated by a minority and are unlikely to be appropriate for volunteers who have individual or personal issues to raise. It is therefore a good approach if time is a major consideration for the volunteer coordinator, but it will not work as a sole approach for the reasons stated.

Operational meetings for staff and volunteers

## This can work well as a way of integrating volunteers and staff, and maintaining contact between them. It should not replace one-to-one support, but as an additional approach, it powerfully communicates the esteem in which the organisation holds its volunteers. General operational meetings are ideal for including volunteers. It does however mean that volunteers might be exposed to staff dynamics and possible problems or difficulties – and not every organisation will be comfortable with that approach. Don’t let that put you off however – there are definite benefits of this approach, such as increasing volunteers’ productivity and sense of loyalty, plus helping volunteers to build confidence both personally and professionally.

**A volunteer notice board**

Having a volunteer noticeboard in a kitchen area is a time-efficient way to ensure that volunteers have access to important information, such as:

## Who’s who: role descriptions and photos of staff members

## Health and Safety information

## Expenses forms

## Organisation vision and mission statement

## News, such as the launch of a new project or money raised for a cause

## Events - public facing and internal

## One-off volunteering opportunities

## Recognition of volunteers.

**Suggestion box**

A locked, regularly opened suggestion box is a great way to give volunteers a voice. Invite anonymous contributions about any or all aspects of the organisation – but ensure that all volunteers are informed of the outcome on reading the suggestions. The noticeboard can be a good place to do this.

Volunteer newsletter

A newsletter specifically for volunteers can help to foster a great sense of community amongst the volunteers of an organisation. Reading about other volunteers, interesting organisation news, interviews with staff and other juicy or funny items is usually a welcome addition to the volunteer programme. The downside of this approach is that it would need to be a reasonably regular commitment – at least one newsletter per quarter. If this sounds too much for a staff member, consider recruiting one or more volunteers interested in getting journalistic work experience – it’s a great project.

**Social events**

## This could be a regular trip to the pub on a Friday evening after work or something more elaborate. This method depends on having an individual willing to take responsibility for organising, or at least leading on social events. Whilst this works for some organisations, it doesn’t necessarily work for all, who might prefer to hold an annual event, perhaps during national Volunteers’ Week (at the start of June).

**Training events**

## This might be appropriate for some organisations, where a number of volunteers receive training for a skill needed for a particular volunteer role. See [Fact Sheet 4d: Training and Development for Volunteers](https://drive.google.com/open?id=0BxM5UHfVB7YWQ1JpOUlwR3JsY00) for more information on providing training for volunteers.

Volunteer Supervision

Carrying out reviews or supervision sessions with volunteers is usually more informal than with employees. Some organisations opt for an informal approach, where the line manager instigates and encourages an ongoing dialogue with their volunteers during their shift hours. Other organisations use a more structured approach, in which a meeting is scheduled in a different environment and time is given over to going through a series of topics.

The main tasks of supervision are:

* Providing feedback to the volunteer on their work
* Offering the volunteer the opportunity to raise any issues they’ve encountered
* Checking how the volunteer’s relationship with other staff, volunteers, clients and management is going
* Covering any practical problems such as expenses or health and safety concerns
* Discussing any training that might benefit the volunteer
* Asking for comments on the way the organisation works
* Providing an opportunity for the volunteer to provide personal feedback.

## **You can download resources to use :**

## The [**sample volunteer supervision framework and checklist**](http://www.wcava.org.uk/resource-library/volunteer-management)2 is composed of three sections and can be amended to suit your organisation’s needs.

* The [**sample volunteer supervision form**](https://drive.google.com/open?id=0BxM5UHfVB7YWSlo0Y0VrRVU0U1k)3 is designed to be used with the checklist, and can also be amended.

Individual or group supervision?

## Individual supervision is the best way of making sure all volunteers are supported properly. Having said that, if volunteer numbers are high, it can take up a lot of time. Your staff resources will therefore play a significant role in determining your organisation’s supervision procedures.

Where should supervision happen?

## It is up to the organisation to decide what will work best for them, although it is important to consider the effect on the volunteer. Meeting in public spaces or non-

confidential areas will tend to limit the conversation, although some volunteers might find meetings in an office intimidating. There is no ‘right’ procedure – achieving an honest and productive dialogue with the volunteer is what matters.

Record keeping

## You should consider how you will record supervision sessions. It is a matter for each organisation to decide whether they will keep records of supervision sessions, where any records will be kept and who will have access to these records.

**For more information**

[National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)](http://www.ncvo.org.uk)

NCVO champions the voluntary sector and volunteering across Britain by connecting, representing and supporting voluntary organisations. It has a reputation as an authoritative voice for the sector.

* [www.ncvo.org.uk](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/) Phone: 020 7713 6161 Email: ncvo@ncvo.org.uk

NCVO Knowhow Nonprofit

Knowledge and e-learning for charities, social enterprises and community groups. Learn from experts and peers, and share your experiences.

* [www.knowhownonprofit.org](https://knowhownonprofit.org/)

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