

## **Template for Volunteer Involving Organisations:** Guidance on Issues, Concerns and Performance

### **Introduction**

This template is to assist Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) with creating their own guidance document on how to deal with any issues or concerns regarding a volunteer's performance (Part 1). It also contains guidance that can be incorporated into a Volunteer Handbook, or similar (Part 2), so that volunteers are aware of expectations around their performance and conduct, and know how to deal with any issues arising, or concerns that they may be experiencing, as soon as possible. We want all volunteers and their host organisations to have a rewarding and beneficial experience of their partnership. All complaints should be resolved openly, fairly and quickly to:

- Protect your volunteers
- Minimise any disruption to your staff, service users and other volunteers
- Demonstrate that your organisation respects its volunteers
- Protect the reputation of your organisation.

Each organisation should tailor its procedure to suit its individual situation. However, it is good practice to avoid using the same grievance and disciplinary policy for both staff and volunteers, and the term 'problem solving procedure' helps to differentiate between the two. Whereas grievance and disciplinary policies for paid staff are formal in their language and tone, the policy you write for volunteers should be more informal in tone.

For guidance or support enacting this template please see Further Information section below.

### **Part 1: Guidance for Volunteer Involving Organisations**

#### **Problem Solving Procedures**

The Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure should be used to deal with situations where a volunteer's conduct or performance may call the host organisation or its services into disrepute.

Examples of a volunteer's behaviours which may lead to formal action being taken under these procedures include:

- Refusal to comply with reasonable requests from the Volunteer Supervisor
- Prolonged absence from a role where specified duties and/or attendance is required
- Incapacity to perform the duties of the post effectively due to substance misuse
- Harassment of any *insert organisation name* employees, volunteers, members, visitors, clients or partners
- Breach of confidentiality
- Breach of volunteer role description and volunteer code of conduct
- Prolonged negative attitude
- Serious misrepresentation or negative representation of *insert organisation name*
- Unsatisfactory performance of the duties of the role

### Stage 1: Informal Procedure

In the event of a volunteer performance or conduct issue arising, the named Volunteer Supervisor (and/or next level of seniority if appropriate) should arrange to have an informal discussion with the volunteer. Following the meeting, sufficient improvement should be seen in the performance issue within an agreed timescale.

This meeting will be conducted informally, although a note of the meeting and agreed actions will be kept.

### Stage 2: Formal Procedure

If the informal discussions have not improved the volunteer's conduct or performance within the agreed timescale or if it emerges that there are allegations of a serious nature, the immediate Volunteer Supervisor (and/or the next level of seniority if appropriate) will arrange a formal meeting with the volunteer.

- The volunteer should be informed of the date and time of the meeting in writing, with at least one weeks' notice by the named person, and given every opportunity to attend.
- This should include a statement setting out in writing the volunteer's alleged conduct, performance, or other concerns, which have led to action taken forward.
- The volunteer will be given the opportunity to be accompanied to the meeting, by a friend or colleague.
- The meeting should be held in a quiet room which will be free of interruptions.

- The meeting should be held by the immediate Volunteer Supervisor (and/or next level of seniority as appropriate) with at least one other person besides the volunteer present to take notes.
- The volunteer should be given an opportunity to fully explain their side of the story and to respond to allegations.
- If reasonable steps to attend the meeting are not taken by the volunteer, the meeting may continue in their absence.

### *Potential Outcomes of the formal procedure*

A formal meeting will result in one of the following:

1. No warning being issued
2. A verbal warning (that will be confirmed in writing)
3. A written warning
4. A final written warning
5. End of volunteering placement

Following the meeting the volunteer must be informed of the decision in writing within two weeks including:

1. Outcome of the meeting
2. How long the warning will last (if relevant)
3. Next steps, in the event insufficient improvement is made by the volunteer
4. The right to appeal and details of a named person to whom they can appeal.

### **Stage 3: Appeals Procedure**

If a volunteer wishes to appeal the decision of the formal procedure, they must write to the named person (see above) giving their reasons for their appeal. A volunteer has 28 days to raise an appeal following receipt of the stage two written letter. This named person will be responsible for arranging a meeting with the volunteer who must take all reasonable steps to attend. The volunteer will have an opportunity to be accompanied to this meeting.

Following the meeting the volunteer will receive written notification of the final decision within ten working days.

### **Gross misconduct**

If a volunteer behaves in a way which is described as gross misconduct then it may be that the above process cannot be followed. Gross misconduct could be described as behaviour which is:

- Deliberately unsafe and could potentially cause significant harm
- Aggressive

- Deliberately discriminatory
- Illegal

In this instance, Stages 1 and 2 will be replaced with the volunteer receiving communications in writing and they will be offered the chance to appeal. During this time the volunteer may be asked to not attend any volunteering sessions and to not undertake any duties that fall under their voluntary role.

## Part 2: Guidance for Volunteers

### Supervision

In all volunteer roles, you should have a named supervisor. Your level of contact and communication with your volunteer supervisor will vary, based on the type of volunteering you are doing, for example, regular, event based or one off.

In all roles, Volunteers and their Volunteer Supervisors are encouraged to discuss ordinary, day-to-day concerns informally. This allows them to be addressed promptly and can prevent situations escalating unnecessarily.

Issues you might want to raise with your Volunteer Supervisor (and/or next level of seniority if appropriate):

- Any tasks you don't understand or struggle with
- An area of volunteering that you are not finding fulfilling
- If you feel like your volunteering was not what you thought it would be when you signed up
- If you are finding volunteering alongside a fellow volunteer or staff member difficult
- Any bullying, abusive or discriminatory behaviour that you witness or have been subject to
- Any health and safety concerns
- Anything in your life outside of volunteering which may be having an impact on your volunteering, and you would like your Volunteer Supervisor to know
- If you want to take a holiday or to stop volunteering (applicable to regular volunteering opportunities)
- Any issues with your expenses

In regular volunteering opportunities you should have regular catch-ups with your Volunteer Supervisor where both parties can discuss any issues they may be having. In these meetings, your Volunteer Supervisor will provide you with positive feedback and may discuss areas to improve, where relevant. As a volunteer, you can also share parts of your volunteering you are enjoying, areas you may not be, and your goals or aspirations are for the volunteering role.

In one-off or event based volunteering, you will not have regular catch-ups; however, you will always have a named Volunteer Supervisor for your shift, receive a start-of and end-of shift briefing. If you wish to discuss any matters with your volunteer supervisor, ask them for an appropriate time to meet.

## How to deal with a concern or an issue (problem) experienced by a volunteer

### Stage 1: Informal Volunteers' Problem Solving Guidance

In the event of a concern or issue arising, the volunteer should raise the matter with their Volunteer Supervisor (either in person or in writing – including by email), or if that is not appropriate, with the next most senior manager (and/or next level of seniority) and have an informal discussion regarding their concerns. If it is not possible to resolve the issue or if the volunteer feels the outcomes from the informal stage are not satisfactory they may escalate their concerns to the formal stage.

### Stage 2: Formal Volunteers' Problem Solving Procedures

If the informal discussions have not resolved the volunteer's concerns or if it emerges that there are allegations of a serious nature, the procedure should progress to stage 2.

- i. The volunteer should be invited to attend a meeting by the Volunteer Supervisor (and/or next level of seniority) to fully discuss their concern or issue (problem). This meeting is expected to be scheduled to take place within two working weeks, or at a date outside of this time scale agreed by all parties. All parties must take all reasonable steps to attend the meeting. The volunteer may be accompanied to the meeting if they choose.
- ii. Following the meeting the volunteer must be informed in writing within two weeks of:
  - Any decisions taken relating to their response to their grievance/problem
  - Their right to appeal
  - A named person to whom any appeal should be addressed, if they are not satisfied with the response they have received.

### Stage 3: Appeal

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the result of the formal procedure, they may progress to stage 3 of this procedure. Volunteers have 28 days to enact this stage after receipt of their stage two written response.

The volunteer should appeal in writing to the named person, stating their grounds for appeal. The named person will organise a further hearing.

Decisions taken as a result of an appeal hearing are final. Following the meeting the volunteer will receive written notification of the final decision within ten working days.

If a volunteer is concerned about criminal activities, a failure to meet legal obligations, financial fraud, miscarriages of justice, health and safety infringements, environmental damage or cover-ups they should raise it with their Volunteer Supervisor (and/or next level of seniority if appropriate).

### Further information

For additional guidance please contact Volunteering Barnet (Groundwork London), [enquiry@volunteeringbarnet.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@volunteeringbarnet.org.uk) or 0300 365 9960.