


Volunteer Inductions

If properly planned the induction can be used for both the volunteer and the volunteer co-ordinator to develop the best ways of working together. Remember that for the first few weeks, the volunteer will still be making up their mind about whether they want to stay with the organisation. By using the induction to help them work through this process you are much more likely to find out about their motivations and end up with a committed happy volunteer. At the end of the induction period, you can both sit down together and talk about how the volunteer feels they are doing, what kind of support they feel they need, any areas where they would like training and which types of work interest them most.

It can be a good idea to talk to the volunteer on their first day about what you hope to cover in their induction period. By explaining exactly what they will be doing over the next few weeks you will help to put them at their ease by letting them know what to expect. There is always room for flexibility later on in the induction period when you both know each other better. On their first day you will probably want to keep things very basic you may want to:

- Introduce them to other staff and volunteers
- Show them round the building; show them where they can put their things, where the toilets are, where they can make themselves something to drink 
- Explain who they can go to if they have any questions or problems
- Show them where they will be sitting and where they can find any equipment they need
- Let them know about breaks; when, where can they buy food locally
- what happens at the end of the day; is there a set time when they leave or is it flexible, do they need to let someone know they are going home
- Explain how they can claim expenses

These are all fairly informal things but they are important because they help the volunteer to feel comfortable. Things like policies and procedures may seem more important but in some ways they are better left until after the volunteer has had all their practical questions answered and feels more relaxed. If you do it this way, you should find that when you get on to more complex things the volunteer feels much more at ease asking you to explain things if they do not fully understand.

There will be some formal things that you need to cover quite early on. It is a good idea to go through any important policies and procedures with the volunteer. It may be tempting just to hand over a file of policies but by going through them you can make sure that the volunteer understands them and is comfortable with them. It is also good for anyone with limited literacy or English who may otherwise be too embarrassed to ask for help. More formal things that you may want to cover might be:

- *Health and Safety*; you will need to physically show people where the fire exits, fire extinguishers, first aid kit etc. are as well as pointing out any potential hazards
- *History, ethos and structure of the organisation*; you may not want to cover this in too much detail unless the volunteer is really interested but it is all useful background information
- *Volunteer Agreement*; this should outline what the volunteer can expect from you and what you expect in return, you will probably want cover how you will train and supervise them, what times you will expect them to come in, what they should do if they cant come in etc.
- *Policies*; what policies you have will depend on your organisation but you will probably want to cover equal opportunities, confidentiality, and disciplinary and grievance



The volunteer will have had to take on a lot of information so you will need to reiterate who they can go to in the organisation to ask questions and where they can find copies of policies etc. Many organisations find it useful to have a volunteer handbook/pack which contains all the information the volunteer needs. When compiling it ask current volunteers what information they would have found useful and think back to how you felt when you started with the organisation. Try to cover all the basic information they need simply and clearly, you can always signpost them towards where or who they can go to for more information about individual points.

The rest of the induction period will probably be taken up with training and the volunteer trying out the type of work they will be doing. Obviously a lot will be dependent on resources, but if you work closely with the volunteer in this initial period you should be able to gain a much better picture of how they work, what interests them, what support they need and what they are hoping to get out of volunteering. In order to let them find out as much as possible about the organisation you might want to let them shadow other staff and volunteers, try out tasks in different parts of the organisation, asking them to attend any events and very importantly remember to invite them to any social events that are happening. All this should mean that after their first few weeks both you and the volunteer should be in a better position to talk about their future in the organisation.

Training

The training your volunteers receive will depend entirely on the kind of work they will be doing, and on the numbers of volunteers you need to train at any one time. Initial training may be required to enable the volunteer to carry out their role effectively, and depending on the role may take hours, days or weeks to complete. Ongoing or refresher training may also be required to keep volunteers skills fresh, or to enable them to develop within the organisation and to take on further tasks.

When developing a training policy you will need to decide what will best meet your organisational requirements, bearing in mind the resources you have at your disposal.