

Volunteer Support and Supervision Meetings

Effective support and supervision meetings are a key component in good volunteer management.

Support and supervision meetings can provide a wide range of benefits to all concerned including:

- Increased motivation of volunteers (and therefore improved retention)
- Shared understanding of how a volunteer's contribution furthers the organisation's overall objectives
- More effective coordination of work
- Better two-way communication
- Reduction in misunderstanding and/or conflict
- New learning opportunities

Definition

Support and supervision sessions are regular one-to-one meetings where volunteering activity is discussed in an organised manner. The session should take the form of a semi-structured meeting with the emphasis on encouraging dialogue between the volunteer manager and the volunteer.

Support and supervision provides a timely opportunity to review the volunteer's progress against their individual role, discussing any problems, developing solutions, and offering new tasks and projects if and where appropriate.

Preparation

The volunteer manager should give advance notice of a support and supervision session to allow for adequate preparation. The purpose of this is to give the volunteer time to review their contribution and think about any issues or problems they wish to raise.

The session should take place in a private, quiet, comfortable place which enables the discussion to take place without interruption.

Frequency and duration

Volunteers should be offered regular support and supervision. In certain circumstances, such as during the induction period, it may be appropriate to hold sessions more frequently. To cover properly all the areas identified below, and assuming adequate preparation, a support and supervision session should take around 45 minutes to one hour.

Content

Effective supervision and support will generally cover three broad areas:

- Review of activities
- Opportunity to further develop the role by offering new tasks/projects
- Training and development review

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You should aim to cover the following issues:

- The health and wellbeing of the volunteer
- What's gone well and what could have been done differently
- Give praise if appropriate
- Address learning points
- Opportunity to widen volunteer's role by offering of new tasks
- Discuss problems and solutions
- Ask for ideas
- Agree level of support offered
- Planned training or training needs
- Support required for learning to be effective
- Review training attended and evaluate outcome
- Date and time of next meeting

Record Keeping

To ensure clarity, it is important to keep records of supervision and support sessions for reference. Supervision and support notes are confidential between the volunteer and their manager and should be kept securely by the manager. Every volunteer is entitled to inspect supervision notes and to suggest amendments. Where there are disagreements these can be recorded.

Principles

Wherever possible, ask the volunteer to assess their own performance. When reviewing the volunteer's activities, ask for their views on how well they have done before giving your own views. People are often quite critical of their work and tend not to take sufficient credit for the things they have actually done well. This then provides an opportunity to give praise and positive feedback.

On the other hand, if there is an issue about the standard of performance, it is better to try to get the person to see the problems for themselves.

Be sensitive to cultural and personal issues

Cultures differ along many dimensions, and in particular this includes attitudes to criticism and the degree to which critical comments are perceived as a personal affront. It is important to be sensitive to this to ensure that individuals do not suffer loss of self-esteem.

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