



EXITING VOLUNTEERS A GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

The Centre for Volunteering acknowledges that building relationships between Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) and their volunteers requires time, effort, resources, communication skills and active engagement in the volunteering process.

The management of volunteers is a balancing exercise at the best of times, it is particularly fraught when the volunteer is required to be exited as a matter of good practice for the VIO. Exiting volunteers may arise out of a number of situations, such as the project the volunteer was recruited for has been completed, the work the volunteer was doing is no longer being done by the VIO or that the volunteer has breached the VIO's Code of Conduct.

It is best practice to ensure that an exit policy is developed and disseminated within the VIO prior to actually recruiting any volunteers. The exit policy should be referred to in the recruitment policy and in the VIO's Handbook. It should be clear and concise so that the incoming volunteer is left without doubt as to the process which is to be followed at the exiting.

The following are some methods by which a VIO can provide its volunteers with a constructive experience during the exiting process for both volunteers and volunteer managers.

Develop an Exiting Volunteers' Policy

Accordingly, a policy should be developed in order to provide guidance when exiting a volunteer. It should be discussed and distributed to staff and be included in the policy statement on volunteer participation.

The exiting policy needs to be documented and include a statement outlining volunteers' rights and responsibilities. This statement should be a part of the Volunteer Handbook which should be provided to all volunteers at the time they are recruited.

The exiting process for a volunteer should include process to assist a volunteer to exit with dignity and also recognise the work the volunteer has accomplished. VIOs should remember that exiting a volunteer for a breach of the Code of Conduct is an admission that their recruitment process was not robust enough to identify the problem with the volunteer¹.

¹ <http://www.volunteerlimerick.ie/resources/volunteer-mangement/32-how-to-fire-a-volunteer>



Typically, exiting can occur where a volunteer has engaged in behaviors or activities which breach the organisation's Code of Conduct and values which can include but are not limited to:

- Theft
- Copyright and intellectual property rights issues
- Privacy breaches
- Volunteering while under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Illegal, unethical, violent or unsafe acts (including harassment, or any form of discrimination)
- Inability to perform assigned responsibilities effectively
- Poor attendance and/or punctuality
- Not complying with all applicable Australian laws
- Providing false or misleading information
- Contradicting the VIO's values

Any such breaches may attract disciplinary action. Disciplinary action may include investigation, removal of privileges or access, repayment of monies, referral to Police in the case of unlawful behaviour, and termination of engagement.

Where the VIO is unclear as to the capability of performance of the volunteer at the time of recruitment, it can offer a Trial Period to enable both, the volunteer and the VIO, to accurately assess the 'fit' of the volunteer to the position.

At the end of the Trial Period, the VIO should:

- Gather performance feedback from clients, co-workers and others in close working contact with the volunteer,
- Provide training, coaching, mentoring or other support to help the volunteer strengthen areas that need to be improved,
- Educate them on knowledge gaps and reinforce policies and provide further guidance,
- Meet with the volunteer and provide feedback,
- Where appropriate, recognise that the volunteer has met the criteria and provide positive feedback, or
- Discuss with the volunteer the situation in hand and acknowledge that, the Trial Period did not disclose a 'fit' with the position and therefore, the VIO will not be proceeding further with the recruitment of the volunteer.

Where the difficulty with a volunteer lies with performance rather than a breach of the Code of Conduct, the VIO should consider establishing a performance appraisal process by:

- Advising the volunteer that they are expected to meet certain performance criteria and detailing the criteria they are expected to meet. As best practice, these criteria should be advised to the volunteer at the time they are recruited,
- Undertaking regularly scheduled performance appraisals with clearly set out criteria,



- Providing feedback on the appraisal, and
- Providing constructive feedback, including matters that require improvement.

If after two (2) such reviews, performance has not improved, the VIO can implement the following options:

- **Additional supervision** - provide additional supervision and mentoring to bring the volunteer's skills up-to-date,
- **Training** – provide training in relation to systems and processes that the volunteer needs to master to properly do their assigned job,
- **Transfer** – where possible transfer the volunteer to a new position within the organisation; it may be a better 'fit' for their skills and capabilities,
- **Referring** – refer the volunteer to the Volunteer Referral Service to explore other volunteering options or to other VIOs who require volunteers,
- **Take a break** – everyone needs a break from time to time, encourage a holiday or just time away from the organisation, and
- **Extend** – where possible and expedient, extend the time that may be required for a project to be completed.

Where all of the abovementioned steps have been undertaken by the VIO then the final steps to exiting the volunteer must be enacted. The VIO needs to:

- Meet with the volunteer in private setting – this should be in conference room or an office with the door closed.
- Be clear as to the reason for the meeting – state the reason for the meeting clearly and concisely. The volunteer manager needs to hone in on the issue as quickly as possible and make it clear that a decision has been made. It may help the volunteer manager to have a quick referral sheet of reasons and conclusions for the decision made.
- Communicate – while the volunteer manager must convey the decision, they have also to listen to the volunteer. The volunteer may accept the decision or they may argue or complain. The volunteer manager must not argue back nor console or counsel the volunteer.
- Acknowledge – the volunteer's work and the contribution they have made to the organisation and thank them for it.

After the exit meeting:

- VIO needs to follow up with a letter to the volunteer re-stating the discussion at the meeting and the decision made and thanking them for their service, and
- Inform all individuals and organisations who dealt with the volunteer that they are no longer a volunteer with the VIO.

Exit Interviews

A VIO can learn much from a volunteer in an Exit Interview, if and when a volunteer decides to leave the VIO independently. The Exit Interview can be a method by



which the VIO can learn what is the best and the worst about their organisation from their own volunteers. This information, in turn, can improve the volunteer programs conducted by the VIO.

The VIO should encourage all leaving volunteers to take part in Exit Interviews and structure the interview in such a way so as to:

- Learn what the organisation is doing well,
- Discover what the organisation needs to improve in its dealings with volunteers, and
- Make improvements to existing policies and procedures.

The Centre has a template for 'Volunteer Exit Questionnaire' for ideas about suitable questions for an Exit Interview.

If the volunteer is unable to attend a face-to-face interview, email them a copy of the questionnaire and ask for their response.

Thanking the volunteer and saying goodbye on a positive message will make it more likely that the volunteer will speak favourably about the VIO in the community. It will also emphasise to the volunteer that their contribution is recognised and valued.

Please Note that this information sheet does not purport to be legal advice. Should you require specific legal advice in relation to exiting volunteers, you should speak to your own legal practitioner.

The Centre for Volunteering has a range of services and resources available for Volunteer Involving Organisations and volunteers. For more information please visit www.volunteering.com.au or contact us on 02 9261 3600.