TORPOINT TOWN COUNCIL

VOLUNTEERING POLICY

DATE OF APPROVAL: - OCTOBER 2018

REVIEW DATE: - JULY 2019

REVIEWING COMMITTEE – Finance and Personnel Committee

Volunteering Policy

Introduction

With an expanding portfolio of assets and service delivery, Torpoint Town Council acknowledges the role that volunteers can play in complementing the operational functions of the Council. The council does not as a matter of course depend on volunteers to carry out work in any manner, however it is considered that the use of volunteers can enhance the performance of the Council, engage more closely with the residents and make Torpoint as a whole a better place to live. The Town Council also recognises the valuable contribution that volunteers make with their diversity of age, experience, cultural background and their involvement within communities that will assist the Council in the delivery of services.
A volunteer is anyone who freely chooses to undertake supporting Torpoint Town Council and the community, through the giving of their time, skills and experience without financial remuneration beyond out of pocket expenses. It is support undertaken by choice and is unpaid. As volunteers who reflect the diversity of their communities, people bring a different perspective to that of professional paid staff, which adds value to our work. By involving volunteers we can offer opportunities for genuine involvement, learning and development for individuals.
Volunteers therefore:

- help with the delivery of our services
- will be active in projects and community-led activities supported by the Council

Purpose of this policy

The Town Council's purpose in adopting this policy is to:

- set out the principles underpinning volunteering within Torpoint Town Council
- highlight and acknowledge the value of the contribution made by volunteers
- reflect the purpose, value, standards and strategies of Torpoint Town Council in its involvement of volunteers
- recognise the respective roles, rights and responsibilities of volunteers at Torpoint Town Council
- help to ensure the quality of both the volunteering opportunities on offer and the work carried out by volunteers

Scope of the volunteer policy

a) This policy applies to volunteers only
b) Where appropriate, the policy refers to and reflects statements and procedures that are covered in other relevant council policies and procedures, e.g. the council's Health and Safety Policy.
c) Unless specifically stated otherwise, the policy applies to all volunteers in all programmes and projects undertaken by or on behalf of Torpoint Town Council, to all departments and site of operation.

Statement of principles of good practice

General

By involving volunteers we will be guided by the following principles of good practice:

a) Torpoint Town Council is committed to ensuring that all volunteers feel valued and enjoy their volunteering experience. Volunteers will be welcomed from all walks of life and will volunteer in a welcoming and inclusive environment.
b) Tasks will be clearly defined so that all concerned with volunteers' activities are sure of their respective roles and responsibilities.
c) Volunteer roles will complement the work of paid staff.
d) Torpoint Town Council policies are reviewed annually or bi-annually including this Volunteer policy.

Recruitment and selection

There is a minimum age of 16 to volunteer (15 for Duke of Edinburgh's Award) and no maximum age. Volunteers engaged by the Council are covered by our Employers Liability Insurance which provides an indemnity in respect of the council's legal liability to pay damages and expenses in respect of death, bodily injury, disease or illness arising out of and in the course of a volunteer's involvement in that specific task/event.

- Volunteer opportunities will be promoted in a manner that ensures there is wide accessibility to the positions we offer. Torpoint Town Council's equal opportunities policy applies to the recruiting and selecting of volunteers (*Appendix 1 of this policy applies to the needs assessment)*.
- Prospective volunteers will be required to complete an application form. (*Appendix 2 of this policy).*
- Written role descriptions will explain what is expected of volunteers in relation to time, commitment, necessary skills, experience and specific duties required.
- Volunteers will be asked to sign a statement (The Volunteer Induction Checklist – *Appendix 2a of this policy)* saying they understand the specific policies that affect them in their role and will be given help and assistance if needed to be able to do this.
- We will ensure that procedures are in place to explain, support and monitor good practice requirements for volunteers.
- We will request two references from prospective volunteers (*Appendix 2 of this policy)*
- Volunteers supporting children/vulnerable older people will be asked to undergo an enhanced Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check. (For services where volunteers are not required to support children/vulnerable older people a DBS check will not be required). For the DBS process the prospective volunteer must show proof of identity.
- Volunteers will be placed in activities which match their skills, talents and interests and, once placed they will be required to comply with Torpoint Town Council's existing policies and procedures (*Appendix 3 of this policy details an example)*.

Support for Volunteers

Torpoint Town Council will invest financial and personnel resources in the management of volunteers. This will be laid out in Town Councils development plan and related budget.

- We will provide an induction programme and a review session for volunteers to assess the progress of their placements and resolve any problems at an early stage.
- Volunteers will be given information on legislation and other policies which may affect them e.g. Health and Safety and Equal Opportunities. In these respects volunteers will be treated in the same way as staff for liability purposes.
- Torpoint Town Council will provide funding for volunteers' out of pocket expenses. Volunteers will be given clear information about what expenses can be claimed and how to make a claim.
- All volunteers will be offered access to support and supervision on a regular basis, with a named person, and will be informed of who to contact in an emergency.
- All volunteers will be offered access to appropriate training to enable them to develop their capabilities and competence in relation to their volunteering role.

Relationship with paid staff

- We will ensure that paid staff at all levels are clear about the role of volunteers and that good working relationships are fostered between them and volunteers association will be clearly established.
- Appropriate training, support and resources will be provided for those who work alongside volunteers and for those who have a managerial role in relation to them.
- Volunteers will be given clear information about the roles undertaken by paid staff
- In the rare event of industrial action by staff volunteers will not be engaged to do the work of paid staff.

Contracts and Service Level Agreements

In entering into contracts or service level agreements which involve volunteers, we will ensure that:

- The role of volunteers is made clear and that satisfactory arrangements are in place for their management.
- The terms of the contract or service level agreement provide for the necessary resources to involve volunteers.
- Arrangements are made to set out the roles and commitments of volunteers.
- The impact of volunteering and its benefits are promoted and acknowledged.

Relationships with other groups and organisations

In all our relationships with other groups, organisations or partners we will:

- promote volunteering as an important means of contributing to service delivery by Torpoint Town Council and building and support of active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect
- Promote good practice in volunteering.

APPENDIX 1

Volunteer Needs Assessment

It is necessary to establish your needs in relation to how many volunteers you need and where you will place them, so that you recruit an appropriate number of volunteers in appropriate roles, and avoid oversubscribing.

The best way to establish this is by considering the tasks that need to be covered and the time you anticipate it will take to carry out the tasks identified.

It is of benefit to recruit a bank of volunteers, rather than one volunteer for each task, as this creates a provision for things like sickness – or unreliability.

For example, if you work out that you need 30 hours a week covered by volunteers, you need to consider how many hours it is appropriate to ask each individual volunteer to carry out. If the answer is five, then you could consider that you need six volunteers. However, in this example, we would recommend recruiting ten volunteers, providing a contingency.

You must, however, remember that if you do this you will need to establish methods of keeping all volunteers engaged, giving them all fair opportunity to contribute.

How many volunteers do you need?	
List essential and desirable skills of potential volunteers:	
Have you worked with volunteers before?	

APPENDIX 2

Volunteer Application Form

Personal details	
First name: Current address: Postcode:	Surname: Date of birth: Email address: Tel no: Mobile no:
Your role as a volunteer	
Please tell us what skills and knowledge you think you can bring to this opportunity and talk about any volunteering you have done before:	
Please tell us what you would like to achieve through volunteering and how you would like to help us:	

Torpoint Town Council

Availability
Which area(s) of Town Council activity would you like to volunteer in: How much time can you offer each week and for how long**:**
Safeguarding
We are committed to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and expect all volunteers to share this commitment. Certain volunteer opportunities where there is regular contact with vulnerable groups may require a DBS check to be carried out. Have you ever been barred or restricted from working with children or vulnerable adults? **Yes/No** If yes, please give details: (Roles involving working with children or vulnerable adults are exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and therefore all convictions and cautions including those regarded as 'spent' must be declared). Do you have any unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings or any charges pending? **Yes/No** If Yes please give details:
Support for volunteers
We will make reasonable adjustments to help people with disabilities/medical conditions. If you have any specific requirements to enable you to volunteer with us please let us know:

Torpoint Town Council

References	
Please give details of two referees not related to you or partners and who have known you for two years or more. Referees must be able to comment on your skills and abilities in relation to being a volunteer. Please state how you are known to them.	
Name: Address: Postcode: Email: Contact no: Occupation/relationship:	Name: Address: Postcode: Email: Contact no: Occupation/relationship:

I agree to my referees being approached for a reference before a volunteer placement can be confirmed.

I have read and understood the Volunteer Agreement and confirm that I am eligible to work in the UK.

I am in good health and do not have any medical condition that could affect my ability to undertake any activities described in the role profile.

I declare that the information given on this form is, to the best of my knowledge, correct and accurate.

Signed: **Date:**

Please return the completed form to the Town Clerk

Data Protection Act 1998 (as amended) - We keep information on file from this application form. All information will be dealt with in accordance with data protection legislation and will not be sold to any third party.

Volunteer Emergency Contact/Next of Kin Details

Your Details

Your Name ……

Next of Kin Details

Name ……

Relationship ……..

Address

……..

……..

……
……..

Post code ……..

Telephone numbers:

Home ……..

Mobile ……..……..

Work ……

Volunteering Agreement

Thank you for volunteering with Torpoint Town Council. We really do appreciate the valuable contribution and practical help our volunteers give across many of our services and teams.

This agreement summarises what you can expect from us and what we expect from you to ensure your volunteer experience with us is productive and rewarding.

What you can expect from us:

- A role profile with the tasks you will be asked to undertake as a volunteer
- A nominated person who will supervise your volunteering and with whom you can discuss your work and receive feedback
- An introduction to the organisation and your volunteering role within it
- Training and development opportunities relating to your responsibilities as a volunteer
- Reimbursement of agreed out-of-pocket expenses incurred in your volunteer role
- Public liability, and personal injury insurance to cover you while you are fulfilling your authorised volunteer work
- Health and safety policies and procedures in place, and provision of personal protective equipment where required

What we expect from you:

- Meet agreed time and duty commitments, or provide adequate notice so that alternate arrangements can be made
- Respect confidentiality and not use or disclose any confidential information for your own benefit
- Abide by Health and Safety, and Equality and Diversity, Data Protection and any other relevant policies and procedures that apply to your role.
- Discuss any complaints or problems you have when undertaking your duties with your Supervisor
- Discuss any changes you would like to make to your volunteering with your Supervisor
- Treat fellow volunteers and staff with courtesy and respect
- Remember that you are a representative of Torpoint Town Council even in your volunteer capacity
- Act in accordance with this agreement at all times

Either you or Torpoint Town Council may terminate this agreement with or without notice at any time.
The volunteer placement will be reviewed after 12 months.

Volunteer Reference Request

Volunteer Applicant Name:……..

Torpoint Town Council are recruiting volunteers to support
……....

We would appreciate your assistance in providing us with a written reference for the above individual. We thank you for your cooperation and time.

Name of Referee:

Address of Referee:

Telephone: **Email:**

Position / Job Title / Occupation:

1. How long have you known the applicant?

2. What is your affiliation with the applicant?

3. Would you recommend that the applicant is suitable to volunteer with all members of the community, including adults and children? Y/N (Expand if applicable)

4. Please evaluate the applicant in the following areas, where 5 = Excellent and 1 = Poor

a) Reliability	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
b) Flexibility	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
c) Time Management	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐

d) Communication Skills	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
e) Interpersonal Skills	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
f) Team working Skills	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
g) Trustworthiness / honesty	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
h) Ability to maintain confidentiality	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐

5. Please add any further comments that you believe are relevant to this supplicant, including any particular strengths or weaknesses of the applicant and any reasons why the applicant should not be a volunteer:

I understand that any misrepresentation made by me in connection with applicant will be just and sufficient cause of the dismissal of the application.

Signature (or name if form emailed):

Date:

APPENDIX 2a

Volunteer Induction Checklist

Name of volunteer	
Site	

Volunteering Information

	Done by:	Date:
Describe role and tasks using Role Description		
Complete Emergency contact details		
Discuss acceptable behaviour/rules		
Line management and support e.g. named supervisor, feedback, complaints, problems		
Discuss time commitments including days and hours and agree		
Discuss Volunteer Agreement and sign		
Reporting sickness and absence		
Out of pocket expenses		

Practical Details

Tour of building, toilets, what's kept where etc.		
Introduction to other staff and volunteers – structure chart		
Work space and advise where to keep personal belongings		
Refreshments, breaks etc		
Health & Safety: fire routes, fire drills, first aid		
Security including door codes and swipes		

Volunteer Safety

Health & Safety Policy		
First Aid box		
Safeguarding Policy		
Data Protection and Confidentiality (especially in relation to IT support)		
Equal Opportunities Policy		
Complaints Procedure		
Communications Policy		

Training

	Done by:	Date:
Training will be delivered as identified on the role profile		
It is recommended that all volunteers should have the following training delivered by the hosting provider: • Health and Safety • Data Protection • Safeguarding • Information Governance ***<u>An example</u>*** *Training in library duties to support the tasks in the role profile should be delivered by local site staff. This could include training on:* • *Shelving* • *Display* • *Supporting customers on the public computers (what to help with and what to avoid)* • *Assisting with on-line services and e-resources* • *Recommending alternative reading genres* • *Dealing with difficult customers*		

Signed (Volunteer) ..... Date.....

Signed (Supervisor) ..... Date .....

APPENDIX 3

EXAMPLE OF A VOLUNTEERING ROLE

Volunteering at Torpoint Library
Possible Roles

How volunteers could help:

Host

- Welcoming customers to the library
- Helping customers issue, renew and return items, check their account and make payments
- Showing customers the layout of the library and helping them to find the book they require
- Assisting customers to search the on-line catalogue and place requests
- Confidently shelve items in alphabetical or numerical order in line with reader services and display guidelines
- Ensuring shelves are neat and in a safe condition
- Finding stock on reservation lists

IT Support

- Helping customers to log onto public access computers
- Helping customers with basic computer tasks e.g. setting up an email account, uploading photos, email attachment etc.
- Helping customers to access e-resources, e.g. e-books and e-magazines
- Helping customers with printing and photocopying
- Heling customers to use scanner
- Helping customers to use the on-line catalogue, check their account and place requests
- Helping customers access government and NHS websites
- Supporting customers to access Universal Credit and Job Seeking websites
- Supporting customers to access RNIB catalogue

Storytime and Rhyme time Sessions

- Reading stories to a group of young children following story time guidelines
- Sharing stories with children and bringing them to life
- Talking about the pictures
- Delivering Rhyme time sessions by joining in and singing songs and rhymes
- Encouraging children to make as much noise as they like using a selection of musical instruments
- Engaging with children and keeping their attention

Children's Activity Support

- Delivering craft activities following a story time or event
- Providing assistance and delivering events and activities
- Help parents and children to choose books and recommend suitable titles

- Collecting feedback and talking to parents and children about what they enjoyed
- Providing refreshments when required and clear up afterwards

Adult Activity Support

- Providing assistance and delivering events and activities
- Collecting feedback about the event
- Engaging with customers and partners to talk about their experience of the event
- Encouraging customers to join the library and help them sign up
- Supporting customers with individual needs to access the event
- Providing refreshments when required and clear up afterwards

Note:
The above is more a list of tasks that volunteers could carry out rather than distinct roles. Additionally it might be possible to work with other organisations that are based in the Library [please note that a direct approach to this organisation might be required]. It is not an exhaustive list and we are interested in any ideas that you may have. Many of these tasks can and will be combined and are complementary to each other.

Volunteer Opportunity Role Profile

Role: Library Volunteer

Role Purpose
To support the delivery of a wide range of library and information services to the community in a devolved or community site.

Responsibilities: (May include **some** or **all** of the following)

- Host
- IT Support
- Storytime Support
- Rhyme time Support
- Children's Activity Support
- Adult Activity Support

(Please see attached 'Possible Roles' for more detail on what is involved.)

Reports to: Community Hub Manager

Opportunities:

- Helping people in the local community
- Personal development and work experience

Aptitudes: (Some of the skills you may have)

- Friendly personality and an ability to get on with people of all ages and backgrounds
- A love of books and reading
- Good understanding of computers, computer skills and applications

- Good communications skills
- Be reliable to ensure a regular service
- Enjoy working with children and young people

Responsibilities:
To be aware of all applicable legislation including:
- Torpoint Town Councils Safeguarding Policy
- Health and Safety
- Data Protection Act
- Copyright Law
- Freedom of Information Act

Time commitment:
Discuss and agree with the Community Hub Manager the time and duty commitments. Give adequate notice if you are unable to meet these so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Training:
Health and Safety, data protection and safeguarding training and a full induction will be provided by the Torpoint Town Council. Further relevant training to support the volunteering role will be offered from time to time and be delivered locally by site s

APPENDIX 4

Working with Volunteers – Guidance

The value volunteers can bring

Initially, volunteers can help with practical tasks that help you to achieve your objectives, but once you have a strong team of volunteers in place, you can start considering other elements that volunteers can assist with.
In simple terms, this is the effective recruitment and retention of volunteers helping organisations to be sustainable and then to grow.
Once you have a strong team, you will be able to introduce elements that you wouldn't have been able to consider without the existence of volunteers – things like open days, for example – things that require substantial people-power.
The short-term objective is to recruit people who can assist with the practical tasks that simply need doing, but the longer term objective should be to achieve a strong team of volunteers who are loyal, dedicated and experienced, so that they are more of an asset to the organisation.

Volunteers as a hindrance before they are an asset

When an organisation first starts utilising support from volunteers, they can initially present as more of a hindrance than an asset, because an organisation will need to spend time training and nurturing and getting to know an individual before they can become an asset, and the value we spoke about in the last section. Volunteering subsequently often presents as counter-productive and it often feels easier to just do something yourself than to invest in resources to guide volunteers to become an asset.
Any organisation with volunteers will, or should, aspire to achieve a team of individuals they can rely upon, who they can trust to 'do a good job'; who can 'just get on with it', but it must be understood that achieving this takes an investment of time from the organisation and, not just representatives from that organisation, but everyone in it.

It involves employing methods of retention, detailed in the next section, but also the introduction of structured processes, which will facilitate both the smooth-running of a volunteering programme for staff so that volunteer involvement presents as easier, and more organised i.e. less of a hindrance.
One of the main reasons many organisations view volunteers as a hindrance is because they think of volunteers as a collective group rather than individuals. They simply think 'we'll get a team of volunteers in to help us'. In reality, the team they recruit is a team of individuals. Where staff are also individuals, they are bound by restrictions of a contract, and not only delivering on tasks, but behaving in a way that justifies their salary and means they keep their jobs. Volunteers do not have this common [element] to bring them together; for the most-part volunteers remain individuals, with their own objectives and preferences, with nothing really to stop them expressing these freely.

This is often a shock to people who have never worked with volunteers before, people who are used to telling someone to do something, who then just does it. And this reality often leads to staff considering that volunteers are more hassle than they're worth.

If volunteers genuinely *are* more hassle than they're worth, an organisation should not consider introducing a volunteering programme (or anything else that's counter-productive). However, with most elements of volunteer recruitment and retention, it's about balance and continually tipping that balance in your favour. In this circumstance, that would involve making the 'worth' override the hassle, but nothing great comes easy and in order that the day-to-day management of a volunteering programme *becomes* easy, you do need to invest resources into it at the outset.

So what is the value in getting past this stage? In investing some time into working with a team to guide them to become an asset?

Any organisation that starts to work with volunteers obviously acknowledges that they need help, and what puts them off having the help is the initial counter-productive investment of resources – the fact that volunteers are not of 'help' straight away.

Why it is crucial to have a focus on retention?

Initially when you recruit volunteers you will hope that they will be things like punctual and reliable, and this is a good place to start. However, the most effective volunteer teams are made up of individuals who are loyal, dedicated and experienced. These are qualities that develop during an individual's time with an organisation, and individuals reaching this stage relies on the organisation having a strong focus on retention.

Getting volunteers to a stage where they are an asset requires a strong focus on retention.

Organisations put substantial resources into recruitment, because they need 'people' and at that stage they're often considering those 'people' as numbers. As covered in the last section, it really isn't fruitful to treat volunteers as numbers – and if you do this you will just be continually recruiting people you can't keep. Recruitment resources are wasted if the organisation doesn't strive to keep the volunteers they have invested these resources into.

Minimising the drop-out rate

The fact that people drop out of volunteering at all stages is something we just have to accept. It's impossible to prevent this entirely; people's lives change and the first things to go when people get busy are the non-essential things they choose to do. However there are lots of things you can do to minimise the drop-out rate.
Sometimes people feel morally obliged to give something back to the community and make an enquiry to volunteer as a result, yet never get as far as filling in the application form. This could be due to those personal life changes but it could be because something about your process puts them off.

Firstly, if someone offers you their time they will expect you to respond promptly and with gratitude. Even if you don't need volunteers at that time it's important to respond quickly, politely and thoroughly; mainly because people who are offering to support you deserve this but also because volunteers – and even potential volunteers – have a huge influence on shaping your reputation.

Make sure you have a process in place for when people enquire so that you can start the ball rolling straight away. Make the application pack quite thorough; don't assume they already know everything about your organisation and specifically the role; tell them about your venture and the role in quite a lot of detail and be realistic and honest. If something about the role may put people off, it is better that it puts them off at this stage before you have invested more time in each other. People will usually appreciate your honesty and giving them lots of information about the organisation makes them feel involved.
Keep correspondence informal, light and upbeat – whatever people's primary reason for wanting to volunteer they are more likely to want to be involved in something that sounds like it will be enjoyable.
When people return their application forms, respond quickly. Get them in for an induction where possible and run through the finer detail with them. This gives them the opportunity to get to know the organisation and the people they will be working with, but it also gives you the opportunity to meet them and assess their suitability for a role.

Volunteers often feel that because they are offering their time for free they will never be turned down, when of course realistically not everyone is suited to every role. Again, it's good to have a back-up plan in place for occasions when someone's not appropriate; have a few different opportunities you can refer them to.
Make sure you talk about what they want to get out of the role and what you can offer them. Volunteering is rarely an entirely altruistic act; people volunteer for a vast array of personal reasons and if you make a role mutually beneficial it's a win/win.
If you keep the momentum going at this stage people are far less likely to drop out.

Attracting volunteers and embracing trends

The best time to attract volunteers is in January – and not only because people make New Year resolutions to give something back to the community. Whether you look forward to Christmas or not, it brings hustle and bustle; some people are preparing for Christmas long before December and January is the anti-climax of all that anticipation. People suddenly have a gap in their lives that Christmas once filled. For anyone who's retired, the gap will be particularly prevalent.
January is also the time that people consider lifestyle changes, including pursuing alternative careers, and volunteering is a fantastic way to kick-start a new career.

The Monday of the last full week in January is widely believed to be the worst day of the year and volunteering makes people feel good about themselves, therefore even just making an expression of interest can cheer people up.
We recommend having a marketing campaign in January, taking all of these factors into account.

If you attract volunteers at a time when they want to be attracted you'll stand a better chance of retaining their support.

So, what can you do to attract volunteers during the rest of the year?

If volunteering enquiries flood in in January, what about the people who were tempted but didn't quite get around to applying in January? How will they feel in February or March after they've endured a couple of months of cold, wet weather and dark, damp evenings? Bear this in mind when you advertise your opportunities; you could be literal and have a headline like 'Fed up of those dark evenings?' which will immediately spark the interest of anyone who is, which, let's face it, most of us are by February or March.

Cornwall is all about the summer months; people live for the sunshine which invites them to the beaches, barbecues and beer gardens, so it's hard to entice them away from that, right? Finders Keepers thinks that rather than losing people to the 'three B's' you should use them to your advantage; i.e. don't hide from the fact that people may well want to be elsewhere; tell them that you really need people in the summer – because people would rather be elsewhere. It's not all about Christmas and summer; what about September when children go back to school? Consider a headline like 'House suddenly empty?' and market along the lines of 'Enjoy it! At least for a few weeks… and then fill the gap by putting your newly found free time to good use; volunteer!'

If people read something that resonates with their situation they will be more inclined to take notice.

Declining offers of support from volunteers

Often when an individual offers to give their time to an organisation, it won't cross their mind that they may not be needed. However, for an organisation, there will inevitably be times when you have to decline offers of support for a number of reasons.
The key here is transparency. Whatever your reason for declining, be honest. You will undoubtedly have a valid reason for declining support and people appreciate honesty and will respect a genuinely valid reason.

Valid reasons for declining support include but are not limited to:

- Over-subscription
- Lack of staff to support greater numbers of volunteers
- Inappropriateness of an individual for a role
- Issues with existing volunteers

Over-subscription

Perhaps you have enough volunteers to fulfil the need. Having more volunteers than you need is counter-productive; you don't want to be in a position where you have to scrabble around to find things for people to do; this is a waste of time for everyone – first and foremost the volunteer.

Volunteers cite being valued as an important part of their volunteering experience and their time is precious and should be treated as such. A volunteer would generally rather you told them you didn't need them, freeing them up to volunteer for an organisation where there is that genuine need, rather than giving them something to do that doesn't really need doing just to avoid declining their offer. If you don't genuinely need them they'll pick up on that pretty sharpish!

Lack of staff to support greater numbers of volunteers

You shouldn't take on more volunteers than you (and your team) can manage. As we've covered, it's difficult to treat volunteers as a collective group. Subsequently the more volunteers you invite into your project the more individual objectives you will need to explore and cater to a certain extent.
Unless you are prepared to increase your staff as you increase your volunteer base, consider what number is manageable. Volunteers should be able to access support at all times and they would be unable to do so if you were spread too thinly supporting too many individuals.
Be realistic about the size of your organisation and tell people who enquire that in order to avoid diluting the experience of your existing volunteers, you purposely avoid over-subscribing.
We suggest you prepare a statement for occasions where you need to decline offers of support for either of the above reasons.

Why you should ensure volunteers are happy

If your organisation utilises support from volunteers, do you ensure they are happy? Perhaps we should first ask: do you care whether or not they're happy?! Aside from the obvious, i.e. that you have a duty of care and if they are giving you their time, the least you can do is make sure they're happy, there are many other reasons that benefit your organisation, which can be summed up by 'happy volunteers make productive volunteers'.
This isn't a manipulative way of increasing productivity – it's creating a mutually beneficial arrangement. If you put effort into ensuring volunteers are happy, they're unlikely to care what your motives are.
Happy volunteers will stick around and volunteers who stick around will become loyal, dedicated and experienced – three things that you should really try to achieve in your volunteer base. People with these attributes are people you know you can trust. Loyal and dedicated volunteers will reflect your organisation in a positive light and they will be reliable.

These elements are far more effective when they come from a genuine desire rather than a response to expectation. Expectation can lead to resentment, whereby if a volunteer is treated well and they develop a loyalty to your organisation as a result, they will do all of the things you hope they will do without you having to ask – because they will want to do them!
Volunteers who are communicated with effectively and are treated appropriately will develop an understanding of the part they play in helping your organisation to achieve its goals which makes them more of an asset. Experienced volunteers will be able to take on more responsibility and they will gain a good overall picture of your organisation, which will enable them to reflect it accurately and positively in all that they do.
Your volunteers play a huge part in shaping your reputation. They're not bound by the same restrictions as paid staff, who may fear for their jobs if they don't reflect an organisation

positively. What volunteers say usually has more of an impact on the audience than what paid staff say, as people often assume paid staff are saying what they're paid to say.
Making sure volunteers are happy can present as fairly complex because volunteers are motivated by different things – and of course it is difficult to please all of the people all of the time!
Ideally you would pay attention to this from the outset; putting procedures in place to ensure volunteers are happy and that they subsequently develop the three attributes that make them an asset. This means that you *prevent* any negative elements.

Volunteers - free labour?

Volunteers are an asset – an added bonus to paid staff and should never be taken on *instead of* paid staff. In addition they bring something paid staff cannot. Despite volunteering very rarely being purely altruistic, volunteers' motives cannot be questioned in the same way as paid staff, in that paid staff have salary as a motivating factor – whether they're in it for the salary or not. Used in the right way this can be a huge asset to organisations. Presentations, for example, can have more of an impact on the audience, if delivered by a volunteer rather than by someone who's paid to be there.
In addition to adopting the right ethics and good practice methods (e.g. not thinking of them as 'free labour') organisations must be aware that however you involve volunteers in your project, the process will cost you time and money. How *much* depends considerably on a number of factors.

People who feel volunteers are nothing beyond the term 'do-gooder', or who feel volunteering is a purely altruistic act, are almost bound to consider that involving volunteers will be easy. All of those 'do-gooders' will queue up to help; they won't even care what they're helping. It doesn't work like this and we go into the details of *why* in some of our other posts. People are not queuing up to help – even attracting potential volunteers to your organisation, let alone the opportunity to volunteer with you, will cost you time and possibly money – and certainly money where time is money.

Often organisations will expect to recruit volunteers before anyone's ever heard of them.

The two main mind-sets that lead to people volunteering are either that they have a bit of time on their hands and they start thinking about worthy causes they can offer their time to, *or* they hear about an organisation they really like the sound of and feel they wouldn't mind volunteering with them. Both require you to have a public presence – and an exceptional and appealing one at that – if you are to attract people.
Sometimes a team can grow organically – perhaps a friend helps out and then a friend of theirs gets involved and things develop in this way – but this is quite rare and actually promotes a loose informal arrangement that isn't the best foundation for a successful volunteering programme.
The way in which you attempt to attract volunteers to your organisation is extremely significant to your organisation's future success.

Negative volunteers – how to manage them

The impact of volunteers who become 'negative' for one reason or another can be huge if not managed.
Most volunteers are happy and positive, by the sheer nature of the fact that they're doing something they have chosen to do. However, most people who have worked with volunteers will have encountered a 'negative volunteer'! 'Negative' is a very broad term and negativity can take many forms.

Perhaps you have a volunteer who is one of the following:

- Is very protective of their role
- Is 'territorial'
- Isn't welcoming to newcomers
- Is someone other volunteers don't want to work with
- Has very forthright and potentially damaging views
- Is always complaining
- Is unreliable
- Causes friction amongst peers
- Is controversial
- Is objectionable
- Is inflexible
- Is egotistical
- Is condescending to other volunteers
- Doesn't respect staff

There are many circumstances that lead to a volunteer exhibiting negativity. It is often because an issue they have cited has not been addressed (and nipped in the bud) by the organisation they volunteer with. Volunteers, unlike paid staff, have nothing to lose by citing issues and expressing distaste if issues aren't addressed swiftly by an organisation.
Taking a prevention rather than cure approach is always preferable – in this case because preventing negativity from setting in is easier than addressing lots of individual causes of negativity. An organisation must have a method of identifying, recording and addressing genuine issues at an early stage. When you ignore an issue it can drift into general negativity because not only does the issue still exist, but a volunteer feels ignored and subsequently undervalued.
It's never too late to implement a prevention rather than cure approach, however, if you have individuals on your team who are currently exhibiting negativity, you need to find out where the negativity stems from and attempt to address the issue individually. Rather than approaching the subject by addressing the behaviour, approach it by addressing the cause. Instead of reprimanding individuals like you may with paid staff, talk to them. Find out if there is an issue that is making them unhappy and causing them to be difficult.

When you talk to individuals, you may discover that they are going through a very difficult time in their personal lives, and their demeanour is actually nothing to do with the role. In which circumstance you can suggest they take some time out of volunteering with you, or you offer them an alternative role until things have settled, or start having regular one-to-ones so that

they can offload to you rather than letting their situation impact on their role, other volunteers, staff and the organisation generally.
Sometimes individuals feel empowered by the fact that they can say what they want and push the boundaries without the 'fear' of consequence that paid staff have. Sometimes individuals see volunteering as a release; they may have spent years in a working environment where they have had to adhere to expectation and may want to enjoy not having to – and sometimes they will inevitably take this too far.

Sometimes individuals continue to volunteer despite being unhappy because they've developed a loyalty to the organisation, but what value can you put on loyalty if the individual presents as negative?

Of course, it is a consideration that being negative does genuinely make some people happy! We unfortunately all know people like this. If an individual is exhibiting negativity in some form that is significant enough to cause wider issues, but claims to be happy, you must be more direct, and highlight the effects of their negativity on the organisation (whatever they may be). Any arrangement with a volunteer needs to be mutually beneficial, and a lot of the time, when we talk about this, it's in the context that organisations should not be all take and no give; that they should appreciate that every volunteer has their own individual objectives. However, there is a fine balance to meet here; you must also ensure you steer clear of any arrangement where an individual is more problematic than productive. Positive volunteers are extremely precious – negative ones are of little benefit.

What you must *not* do, is let a situation that is becoming detrimental to your organisation in one way or another continue under any circumstances.

Organisations often shy away from dealing with volunteers who are causing issues because there is a sensitivity attached to 'reprimanding' individuals who are giving you their time freely. This doesn't mean you can't address things; it just means that it is imperative that you do it appropriately. This isn't just because an individual is giving you their time freely; it is also because your organisation needs to consider damage limitation.
Treating volunteers well extends to the way in which you tell them they've done something wrong and the way in which you address issues.

In the age of social media, saying what you think doesn't just mean telling a few peers. One comment can shape, reshape, or *damage* your reputation.

Volunteers sometimes feel that because they are giving you their time for no financial gain, they can do whatever they want and say whatever they want because you need them. However, they should realise that their contribution of time is cancelled out if they are causing issues in their contribution. In the same way that often when a potential volunteer approaches an organisation to offer their time and the organisation is fully subscribed and has to decline, an individual can take this as a negative thing. Some volunteers just don't understand how an organisation would not welcome everyone who's offering their time, regardless of the organisation's position.

This situation is all about transparency. You wouldn't do anything without good reason, so explain the reason(s). People can generally appreciate and understand where you're coming from if you explain the reasons behind it.

In summary, where you have volunteers who are exhibiting negativity you need to address where the problem lies; i.e. is it with the individual or the organisation? First address what the organisation can do to improve the situation and if this is not productive you must accept that this partnership may have reached the end of the road.
If you can evidence to an individual that the organisation has done everything it can to improve a situation, yet the situation remains the same, it is difficult for them to challenge that going your separate ways is the only solution.

The significance of peers

We often spend more time with our colleagues than we do with our own families so interpersonal relationships amongst staff are always significant – whether in a positive or negative way.
If you think about it, it's a bit of a strange concept that people are thrown together in working environments to contribute in their own ways to the success of an organisation, but the sheer quantity of time we spend with these people make them a significant part of our lives generally.

Colleagues support each other through tough times – both work and non-work related, they mark your birthday and give you Christmas cards, support your work; you develop relationships with all of these people on some level. The workplace is often the foundation of many lasting friendships and bonds are formed amongst colleagues. It's often this environment that attracts potential volunteers, who regularly cite 'meeting people' as one of their main reasons to volunteer. People volunteer for lots of different reasons but all have the common aim of wanting to be *part* of something – for whatever reason. It's therefore important to accommodate this.

Often when organisations think about volunteer support, they think about it in the context of what volunteers can do for them and not what they can do for volunteers. It is important to consider what volunteers want to get out of their experience because if their objectives are being met they will be more productive.
A good foundation for a positive volunteering experience is to create a positive environment. In relation to peers, this should involve coordinating volunteer get-togethers. If you are able to do this in a volunteer's day-to-day role, you should. I.e. can you ask volunteers to come in at the same time so that they can carry out their tasks alongside other volunteers? Can you make a social event out of a task?
If day-to-day tasks for volunteers do not facilitate them meeting with other volunteers, it is crucial that you provide regular opportunities outside of their tasks to meet other volunteers. This helps to create a social environment for volunteers; it gives them something else to volunteer for – and not just the cause or the role. It often gives them another dimension to their lives as it can open up other opportunities. Enabling this isn't just the organisation being nice to the volunteer – it makes good business sense – happy volunteers are more of an asset.

In addition, if you formalise methods of peer support, maybe by providing new volunteers with a 'buddy' for example, they can formally support each other, lessening the load for the person responsible for managing your volunteers. Experienced volunteers make great mentors for inexperienced volunteers because they know the role better than anyone. In addition, formalising this peer support role empowers the experienced volunteers and gives them another sense of purpose which constitutes a win/win arrangement.

Often volunteers cite a divide between roles; and may operate in silos. It is extremely common for this to get out of hand, in that one team may think negatively of another team. Any negativity should be prevented where possible and nipped in the bud if it happens.

It is important to bring your volunteers together, both practically – by facilitating get-togethers, but also by emphasising that they are all part of one cohesive team, contributing to the aims of the organisation alongside the department in which they contribute.

You do this by having centralised processes for *all* volunteers, to promote equality and consistency, and by keeping volunteers informed on what other departments are doing. This is easier if you have a designated Volunteer Coordinator, but if you don't, it is vital that the staff who head up individual departments work together to facilitate this approach.

Why volunteer management is an organisation-wide issue

Whether or not an organisation has a designated member of staff to focus on volunteer recruitment and retention, it is an organisation-wide issue.
Often it is operational staff and not the Volunteer Coordinator who works direct with volunteers so even the best Volunteer Coordinator relies on the buy-in of the entire organisation to ensure a volunteering programme is effective and successful. The Volunteer Coordinator can (and must) put centralised processes in place but unless the rest of the organisation reflects them they are counter-productive.

Managing, or even just working with volunteers, is a specialist skill. Operational staff are not usually recruited with this skill in mind; they are usually recruited because they can bring operational skills to operational roles. It is the organisation's responsibility to provide staff with the guidance to be appropriate and consistent in their relationships with volunteers.

However, the effective management of volunteers is more of a mind-set than a practical set of tools and it's very difficult to 'teach' people to have an appropriate mind-set. Methods of retaining volunteers don't need to be big, grand gestures; in fact it's the smaller, more subtle gestures that maximise retention. Things that are simple for staff to adopt but harder – or at least more awkward – to convey. For example, simply *saying* thank you to volunteers on a regular basis goes a long way but it may feel a bit condescending to ask staff to say thank you – despite the fact that they often need a reminder because it's easy to drift into taking volunteers for granted.

The most effective way to demonstrate an appropriate mind-set and to convey how seemingly smaller gestures can have a significant impact on a volunteer's experience is to create a central 'ethos' for working with volunteers and to detail this ethos in a 'Working with Volunteers Policy'. Putting 'We thank our volunteers for every contribution to our work' in a centralised policy feels more appropriate than asking staff to do so.

In addition, a Working with Volunteers Policy facilitates a 'prevention rather than cure' approach; if you cover everything you can think of in this policy it will prevent issues from occurring. It also means you won't have to address the same issue time and time again – because you've prevented it once. So it's a very time and cost effective approach.
Once you have created your policy, it should be read and signed by each and every existing member of staff so that they are clear on what is expected of them in relation to their work with volunteers. It should also be incorporated into new staff inductions and, furthermore,

organisations should consider emphasising the necessity of an organisation-wide approach to volunteer management at an early stage; by asking questions about working with volunteers at interview for example, or including it on Job Descriptions/Person Specifications.

This emphasises to staff the importance of getting this right and also demonstrates the value you put on your volunteers.

Reliance on individual volunteers

We know that most staff would not intentionally take advantage of people who offer their time. However, there are so many ways in which this can happen unintentionally.
When things are frantic, it's natural to ask for help from the volunteers who are most likely to say yes, and most likely to do a good job, and it's easy to overlook the negative implications of doing this.

There are, of course, ethical reasons not to over-utilise individuals, and reasons that make good business sense, meaning getting this right is both beneficial to volunteers and the organisations they contribute to, making it a significant element of your volunteering programme.

The optimum aim of most volunteer-involving organisations is to have a volunteer team that is strong in terms of both quantity and quality; i.e. lots of volunteers who are all experienced and skilled, and subsequently an asset to the organisation. However, ensuring a high number of individuals reach this position involves substantial work and resources, which often means that, instead, organisations rely on individuals who are already *at* that stage.

It is a preferable approach to put the resources into getting other volunteers to this stage; to make an initial investment of time – and money where time is money. This is for many reasons. If you rely on an individual volunteer to the point that their leaving would have a significantly detrimental impact upon the organisation, for example – if only one individual has responsibility for a task – you are putting the organisation (or at least that task) in a precarious position. Volunteers often enjoy having individual ownership of a task, and if they're happy and you're happy, it's difficult to consider why you should change it and fix something that isn't broken. It may not be 'broken' but its potential to *become* broken is what makes it precarious.
Aside from anything else, relying on individuals creates a vicious circle, whereby you risk exhausting individuals and causing burnout – so they leave because of the pressure of you relying on them. You may think you would spot this coming from a mile off, but diligent individuals who care about a cause and an organisation are good at hiding evidence of pressure, and when you rely on individuals you make it difficult for them to say no, which makes it harder for staff to spot that an individual may be reaching burnout/ feeling pressured. This could not only mean you lose a valued individual, but it could impact negatively on the organisation's reputation.

Volunteers are, of course, free to leave at any point, with no notice period, so rather than attempting to develop skills in mind-reading to enable you to spot burnout potential, why not put measures in place to prevent burnout from ever happening?

Relying on individuals also creates imbalance. Volunteers who know you are reliant on them as individuals occasionally become problematic because they develop the view that they are indispensable and subsequently able to call the shots to a certain extent.

This is a situation you need to nip in the bud and work to prevent, because how volunteers behave sets a precedent for other volunteers and, as a volunteer-base grows, it becomes very difficult to alter an ingrained culture; it is preferable to engineer an *appropriate* culture from the outset.
If you have a *team* of volunteers but still find yourself relying on the same individuals, you are effectively neglecting the rest of your team when you should be doing the opposite. It is essential to keep a team of volunteers *engaged* and there are various proactive methods you need to undertake to do this. Giving them all fair opportunity to contribute is the most basic method of maintaining engagement.

Relying on individuals causes issues amongst peers as it suggests some kind of favouritism. It makes individuals who aren't regularly utilised feel, at best not needed, and at worst inadequate. If individuals genuinely aren't needed you should set them free! If they are needed – even if that's periodically rather than regularly/continually, it is essential that you maintain engagement to make them feel like part of a cohesive team – and part of the organisation.
You are also missing a trick by relying on individuals; relying on volunteers at all suggests you really benefit from volunteer support and if volunteers are so beneficial, why wouldn't you want to multiply the numbers of people who can offer the support? By doing this you not only increase the *support* but, dependent on the nature of your organisation, you may be able to increase the services you are able to offer because you have the resources to facilitate them.

In addition to the fact that ignoring a chunk of your team means you are not making the most of the opportunities having a large quantity of volunteers presents, you may not be realising the potential of other individuals because you are busy relying on the ones who may be more vocal about what they are able to contribute.

What to do when a volunteer drops off of the radar

We have already covered 'minimising the drop-out rate' and the things that may lead a volunteer to drop-out somewhere along the process of getting them on board – or indeed once they are on board.
It can be quite disconcerting if you have been communicating with an individual who appears keen and then they suddenly disappear.

As we covered under 'minimising the drop-out rate', people dropping out of the process is the nature of the beast when it comes to volunteering. However, obviously if someone just stops communicating mid-application, it is necessary to establish a) if the individual is OK and b) whether or not to archive their application.
We would suggest initiating contact via every available method and putting a time limit on their response. This contact could politely acknowledge that they haven't responded and you would like to check they are ok. In addition, can they please get in touch to let you know whether they wish to withdraw their expression of interest. If you don't receive a response within, perhaps, two weeks, you should archive their application.

If an individual has already started volunteering with you, you should have obtained their emergency contact details at induction, and you have a duty of care to that individual to use these to ensure they are ok.

Tips for working with volunteers

- Put yourself in their shoes
- If you're a paid member of staff, imagine doing your role for nothing; how would you expect to be treated?
- Be realistic
- Perhaps you have founded an organisation and you are unpaid. Can you expect the volunteers who get involved to share your passion? Can you realistically expect them to invest the time and energy you invest?
- The good must outweigh the bad/pick your battles
- Perhaps an individual never turns up on time but when they do get there they're great. Therefore how much emphasis should you put on the fact that they're always late? When the bad outweighs the good it needs addressing, because this is obviously counter-productive, but until that time, think hard about what is worth bringing up and what is worth letting go.
- Have 'low expectations' - This sounds negative and maybe even insulting to volunteers – however it just creates the right attitude because every contribution a volunteer makes should be appreciated and having low expectations facilitates this. When you expect a lot from volunteers it's easy to become complacent and to subsequently take them for granted.
- Volunteering has to be mutually beneficial
- You recruit volunteers because you *need* volunteers – they don't need you. They will have needs which will need to be established, acknowledged and addressed.

It is not like managing staff - Managing staff and managing volunteers are entirely separate entities. In our opinion, managing people who are paid to adhere to scores of 'rules' is simple compared to managing those who are not.

- Don't underestimate what's involved in recruitment - People often think volunteers will be queuing up to help but how do they know about you? And do they know *enough* to dedicate some of their valuable time to helping?
- Small gestures make a big difference - Volunteers don't want organisations to spend a lot of time and money showing gratitude as this can make their contribution counter-productive. Smaller gestures like simply saying 'thank you' will be expected – particularly as it takes nothing to say thank you. However, as these gestures are small and simple, organisations often forget to do them and overlook their significance.

Consider retention before you consider recruitment

There is little point going full steam ahead into recruitment if you don't have plans in place to maintain a potential volunteer's interest and to keep them in