

This factsheet covers:

What could go wrong?.....	1
A volunteer is unhappy with the organisation	1
Organisation is unhappy with the volunteer.	2
Managing difficult interviews	3
Do your homework.....	3
Make sure all the practical issues are sorted.....	3
During the interview	3
How to let a volunteer go.....	4

Providing regular support for volunteers is a way of ensuring that they are doing what you need them to do. You may be offering them opportunities to gain experience and develop their skills to enable them to be more effective, but sometimes a volunteer may not recognise the support that you offer, and a challenging situation can arise.

Always try and resolve any problems by providing support, talking through the issues in an honest and straightforward way. What could be done differently to meet both the needs of the volunteer and the group/organisation?

Difficult situations are usually resolved with support, but, sometimes, on rare occasions, the situation may become irresolvable. This is when using your disciplinary process may be necessary – and it would be useful to involve members of your committee or Board of Trustees to help you in this.

What could go wrong?

A volunteer is unhappy with the organisation

Unfortunately, it sometimes happens that the volunteer is unhappy with the organisation. Most problems can be recognised and resolved if the organisation has clear structures and processes in place.

Problem	Solution
Organisation does not contact potential volunteers in time.	Prepare and implement a strategy to answer potential volunteers as quickly as possible (within 48 hours). If you get too many enquiries, review your roles and recruitment strategy. Have templates of emails that you could adapt quickly to send to each individual enquiry.

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Challenging situations

Volunteer is not happy with their role.	Talk with a volunteer through their role, referring to the role profile, and why they volunteer. If necessary, try to find an alternative role or adapt an existing role.
Volunteer feels that they are not treated the right way.	This comes down to regular support/supervision sessions. It is helpful to have a clear problem-solving policy, so if the problem cannot be resolved by the immediate supervisor, you and your volunteer know who, how and when they can address the problem further.

Organisation is unhappy with the volunteer.

We understand that it is a sensitive subject to deal with volunteers that seem problematic for the organisation. Whilst there is not a formal contract, one of the principles of volunteering is 'mutual benefit for the organisation and the volunteer' so you need to be sure that your volunteers are right for the organisation and the tasks that they do.

Having a volunteer policy and volunteer agreement will help you to clearly show a volunteer what are the requirements, code of conduct, policies, and procedures that the organisation is governed by.

Problem	Solution
Volunteer does not come at appointed times and does not let organisation know about it.	At the support session you can review the agreement that you have with volunteers about the times that they have agreed to volunteer. Explain why it is important that they come on time. Remind them that they have been requested to ring if they cannot attend the session. Is there a reason that they aren't coming such as feeling unskilled, unsupervised, family commitments? Is there a solution such as training or support? There may be reasons that you cannot help with, but it will help the volunteer depart with a mutual understanding.
Volunteer does not perform the tasks that they agreed to do.	Take similar approach as to the above point. The reasons might be different but the technique for resolving it is the same.
Volunteer does not behave in the appropriate manner.	Refer to your policies and procedures and the volunteer code of conduct. Do not just hand it to the volunteer. Spend time going through them with the volunteer and explain why they are important.

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Challenging situations

Managing difficult interviews

Sometimes a formal approach needs to be taken - to resolve an issue. It is worth considering that this does not necessarily lead to parting ways with the volunteer and needs careful handling.

If all other approaches have been tried, a formal interview may be necessary.

Do your homework.

- Make sure you are fully up to date with all relevant facts.
- Collect any documentation together.
- Consider outcomes and decide on the most beneficial (this may be done with colleagues, if appropriate)
- Rehearsing how you will make your points and answer any predictable questions can help you feel more confident.
- Write a plan for the interview that you can stick to.

Make sure all the practical issues are sorted.

- The person knows who they will be seeing and what their role is.
- Ensure the person is expected.
- Have a suitable venue away from other staff.
- Set out the venue so you will be sitting facing the person, without a desk or table between you and try to ensure that your chairs are the same height.
- Make sure that you will not be interrupted.
- Make sure that you have allowed enough time for the interview.
- Prepare mentally – switch off from any other work, do not appear harassed.
- Have all the necessary information to hand.
- If safety might be an issue, schedule the meeting for when a colleague is around and easily accessible. Always sit between the person and the door.
- Dress appropriately – you must be comfortable but remember you cannot complain about someone's lack of professionalism if you look scruffy.

During the interview

- Remain cool, calm, and collected at all times.
- Take a breather by referring to your notes.
- Keep focused on what is really most important – ensuring the best service to clients – not necessarily the volunteers need.
- Try to get agreement to your desired outcome if at all possible
- Do not allow yourself to be talked out of the outcome you want.
- Make sure the volunteer is left in no doubt about the outcome, be absolutely clear and check they have understood.
- Always thank the volunteer for their contribution to the organisation, no matter what the outcome.
- Make sure all relevant people know the new situation afterwards (they do not need to know the reasons why).

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Challenging situations

How to let a volunteer go

Dismissing a volunteer is not the only option. It is an admission that the organisation's systems have failed. One of the alternatives below may resolve the situation satisfactorily. Do not use them when dismissal is the only solution. The short term, easy way out will only build more problems for the future.

- **Re-supervise** – the volunteer may not fully understand the rules or in the case of many young people automatically challenge boundaries. An alternative supervisor might make all the difference.
- **Re-assign** – a different role, location, or group of people to work with may help.
- **Re-train** – some people take longer to learn than others, we all learn in different ways, so try an alternative style of training.
- **Re-vitalise** – burn out is not unusual in stressful volunteering situations. A break or change to a less demanding role should help.
- **Refer** – another organisation could have a more appropriate role, or the Volunteer Coordinator could find a new placement.
- **Retire** – Let them leave with dignity and major acknowledgement of their contribution. Awards and parties are good “send offs.”

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