



Managing volunteers - the essentials

Factsheet 5 - Volunteer Induction

1. Why have an induction?

Your organisation has made a commitment to working with volunteers, and you have already invested your time, energy and money in recruiting and selecting new volunteers. Having made this substantial investment, it's vital not to squander it by offering a poor induction. A good induction sets the right tone, welcomes new volunteers into your organisation, and reassures them that they will be valued, and are going to enjoy their volunteering.

Starting voluntary work with a new organisation can be quite daunting. Many people will never have been volunteers before, so won't know what to expect. Some may never have previously been in a workplace environment. Even if they have volunteered before, your particular environment will still be new to them. When volunteers first start, they are still in a phase where they are assessing your organisation and deciding whether they have made the right choice to volunteer with you.

2. What to include in an induction programme

The main aim of an induction is to enable new volunteers to have a reasonable understanding of the work of your organisation, and sufficient knowledge and skills to make a start with their volunteering. In devising your induction programme, it is helpful to think about whether the information you are providing is "need to know" or "nice to know". In other words, is it something essential for the first few days or weeks, or can it be learned gradually as they continue their volunteering?

Some of the things you may want to include in an induction are:

- information about the organisation, and where the new volunteer fits in (you could include an organisational tree or "Who's Who" chart)
- an introduction to the area or department in which they will be volunteering
- how to make a start, and what to expect in the first few days or weeks
- introductions to key staff and volunteers with whom the new volunteer will be working, in particular the volunteer's immediate line manager, to whom they can address questions or go to with any problems
- dates of any forthcoming training sessions they need to attend
- a task description listing the volunteer's duties
- expectations, responsibilities and rights, perhaps contained in a Volunteer Agreement, a copy of your Volunteer Policy and other key documents (such as Health & Safety and Equal Opportunities), ideally contained in a Volunteer



Handbook

- where to find essential things such as fire exits, toilets and kitchen facilities, and a layout map of your building
- practicalities such as office hours, break times, phone and internet usage, and how to claim expenses
- a chance for the volunteer to ask questions and for you to check their progress

2. When and how to do an induction

The main part of an induction should take place when the volunteer starts. However, this does not mean that you must tell the new volunteer absolutely everything they will ever need to know on their first day. Be realistic about the amount of information you give them in one sitting. Deal with the practical things first, to put the volunteer at ease, then move on to more complex issues such as organisational policies.

Inductions can become boring if there is a large volume of information to impart. It helps to think about inductions as another type of training. Training is always more enjoyable, and information is more likely to be absorbed if the techniques you use are interactive and varied. Adults have different learning styles, and it's important to remember this when devising your induction programme.

Always ask the new volunteer about how they learn best. Some information should be conveyed in the form of words, some as images, and some as activities. Never be tempted to hand the volunteer a large file of policies to wade through alone. People with limited English or literacy problems may feel embarrassed to ask for help, or could even pretend they have understood them when they haven't. This could be storing up problems for the longer term. Spend some time going through key points of essential policies with your new volunteers.

3. A more engaging induction programme

Some of the following techniques can help to make your induction programme more successful and imaginative:

- use quiz-style checklists for new volunteers to complete
- have a "treasure hunt" for pairs or teams of volunteers to locate things
- show videos, slides or presentations to make information visual
- ask experienced volunteers to show new volunteers around, answer questions, or give talks
- have a safe question and answer session, where groups of new volunteers write down questions anonymously, put them in a hat, and you answer them
- give new volunteers the opportunity to shadow existing volunteers, watching what they do, and why they do it in a particular way



4. Group or individual induction?

Inductions can be carried out with individuals or with groups. Which option you choose will really depend on:

- the number of volunteers you take on
- the nature of the volunteering roles
- your own time availability
- your budget
- physical space

Group induction is particularly cost and time-effective, as you will only need to run the induction programme once. It can have the added bonus of allowing groups of volunteers to meet and form supportive working relationships and networks. It will also generate discussions about relevant policies or issues. Group inductions are generally used in situations where you recruit significant numbers of volunteers at one time, and/or where the new volunteers will all be carrying out similar kinds of work. You will need a large room, some refreshments, and possibly some help from experienced volunteers or staff. You should give some thought to the best time to hold the group induction, so that it will take place at a time and venue that everyone can attend. You will also need a contingency plan for inducting volunteers that are unable to attend on a particular day. This may be easier if you plan a rolling programme of induction events throughout the year.

If you decide to induct new volunteers individually, this will obviously be more time and labour-intensive. If you are using individual inductions, you will need to adjust the programme according to the individual, especially if you are involving volunteers with extra support needs. Although one-to-one inductions take more time, it may be easier to gauge whether your new volunteer is absorbing all the induction information you are providing. Volunteers may appreciate that you are giving them your time, and this may make them feel more valued. Whoever you are inducting, you should never rush the programme. Spending time on a strong induction is time well invested, as it will save you a great deal of management time in the long run.

5. After induction

Once the volunteer has completed a few sessions of volunteering, you will have a better idea of what kind of person they are, and what interests them most. You will get to know what support or training they would benefit from, and what they hope to get from their volunteering. Aim to keep communication channels open by talking to the volunteer regularly, and providing them with plenty of opportunities to ask questions.

6. Do you need help with your induction programme?

If you need help designing and improving your induction programme, please speak to a member of staff from Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets. Call 020 7377 0956 or e-mail info@vcth.org.uk
