

EAST OF ENGLAND FAITHS COUNCIL

INTERFAITH WEEK PREPARATION DAY

FOR LOCAL INTERFAITH GROUPS

Tuesday 17 July 2012

WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS

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1. One-off events

Most Interfaith Week events are one-offs, and so this mini-workshop is designed to help local interfaith organizations to work with volunteers for a one-off event. This may involve volunteers helping on the day, eg on a stall, and also volunteers helping over a longer period, eg publicity.

2. Clear understanding of what is on offer by both sides

It is vital that both the organization and the individual volunteers understand very clearly what is on offer. Otherwise, there can be an accidental mismatch of expectations, and one or both parties can end up feeling badly let down.

The organization needs to know if the volunteer:-

- Is offering to come to where the organisation wants them
- Is offering clearly specified time to the organisation
- Has particular skills and/or experience, which they are offering
- Is offering to take on, and if necessary, complete, a clearly specified task
- Needs any help in order to volunteer for the organisation (eg bus fares; travel directions; etc.)
- Expects to get something material in return for their volunteering (eg meal; free books; free goods; shopping voucher; discount; etc)

The Volunteer needs to know if the organisation:-

- Has clear directions to the venue, including public transport and parking
- Offers any help with travel (travel expenses reimbursed; parking pass; transport provided, etc)
- Has specified times when they need the individual volunteer
- Has arrangements for breaks, meals
- Is providing any refreshments or meals, or not
- Is providing any chairs, or wet weather provision, or whether the Volunteer needs to bring their own along
- Has a designated person to whom they can take any problems
- Has insurance cover for all volunteers

3. Clear understanding of what is expected on both sides

When the above issues have been discussed and agreed, there should be little room for misunderstandings of what the volunteer plans to offer to the organisation, and what the organisation plans to offer the volunteer.

This agreement between an organisation and a volunteer is one of honour, as opposed to law. It is easy to accidentally create a contract in law, which in this case would be one of employment, eg by saying to a volunteer, "You work for three hours for us, and we shall give you a specific item in return". This item could be a free book, or goods, or shopping voucher, etc. This could, and probably would, be interpreted by an employment tribunal or court as creating a contract of employment. Then the organisation would be liable to pay the volunteer at the minimum wage for all the time they gave to the organisation. This would be expensive, and could draw the organisation into dealing with a lot of red tape, eg taxation and NIC.

It's important to make it very clear to both the organisation and the volunteer what is expected of both parties, without falling into the trap of accidentally creating a contract of employment. Fortunately, there are ways to do this fairly easily:-

- A. Do not use work-related language when speaking or writing about volunteering. So do not talk about 'volunteer work', 'volunteer job', or 'volunteer duties'; instead, talk about 'volunteer **tasks**', or 'volunteer **roles**'.
- B. Do use a "Volunteer **Task** Description" for each volunteer, with one copy for the organisation and one for the volunteer. Do **not** ask the volunteer to sign it, nor do so yourself – this could easily be argued to be creating a written contract of employment. A sample Volunteer Task Description is attached.
- C. Do use some sort of claim form for any repayment of volunteer expenses – a simple petty cash form is fine. Avoid giving 'flat-rate expenses'. Make sure that receipts are attached to cover the amount you are refunding, eg bus tickets, etc. The volunteer should sign the claim form.

4. Training

This need not be formal, nor need it take much time. It is well worth going over the tasks to be carried out, in advance, so the volunteers have a clear idea of what to do on the day.

5. Induction

On the day, make sure that you welcome each volunteer as they arrive. Show them where they should go/be, and make sure they are clear about what they are going to be doing, and for how long.

Give the volunteer a map of the location, either verbal or printed, so they know where they are in relation to facilities.

6. Support

Make sure the volunteer is able to ask for any help or advice they need in order to carry out their tasks. Make sure they are not left alone or isolated for long periods of time.

Make sure the volunteer is able to take breaks, especially loo breaks, and that they are able to get refreshments and a meal at reasonable times.

If at all possible, enable the volunteer to leave their tasks for a short time, to walk around and look at other stalls and exhibits.

Offer the volunteer reimbursement of expenses, etc, if that has been agreed in advance – don't keep them waiting, or make them ask for them.

7. Recognition

Do show the volunteer your appreciation and recognition of their contribution to your organisation.

Give a verbal 'thank-you' at the end of the volunteer's session, including positive feedback where appropriate.

Send the volunteer a written 'thank-you' within the next week; perhaps a letter from you or someone at the top of your organisation, or perhaps a pretty 'thank-you' card, signed by several members of your organisation.

If your organisation produces newsletters, send one to the volunteer next time it is issued, especially if it contains a write-up of the event.

Beware of giving gifts, which could be seen as benefits in kind by the Tax or Benefits authorities. The volunteer could possibly get into trouble with one of these, particularly if the gift has a clear monetary value, eg a book token or shopping voucher.

Think about giving the volunteer a certificate for their input. Various very attractive certificate templates are available online to download – especially good if you have a colour printer.

SUMMARY

Clear understanding of what is on offer by both sides

Make sure both parties know what is going to happen.

Clear understanding of what is expected on both sides

Use a Volunteer Task Description form, unsigned.

Training

Go over the tasks and timings.

Induction

Ensure the volunteer is met, and helped to get into position ready to begin their tasks.

Support

Ensure the volunteer is not abandoned, but is able to take short breaks, and offer them reimbursement of expenses, if they were offered during the initial discussions.

Recognition

Thank the volunteer verbally on the day, and send a written 'thank-you' within a week.

Consider giving them a certificate, and send them any newsletters.

Beware of giving gifts, as they can involve the volunteer in problems with their benefits or tax.

**Enjoy putting your event on, and enjoy your involvement with
volunteers – they are brilliant!**

Resources

For help and advice, contact Volunteering England's website: www.volunteering.org.uk, which contains a lot of helpful information and specimen forms, etc. Also contact your nearest Volunteer Centre: from Volunteering England's website Home Page, follow the links: Who We Can Help – Volunteer Centres – Find your nearest Volunteer Centre.