

Support and supervision

Good support and supervision is about finding an effective balance between the needs of the volunteer and the needs of the organisation. Because volunteers are not paid, maintaining enthusiasm and motivation is critical to successful management.

Particularly for roles which require a regular commitment, the organisation needs to make sure volunteers' energy and enthusiasm is harnessed effectively to benefit the organisation on an ongoing basis.

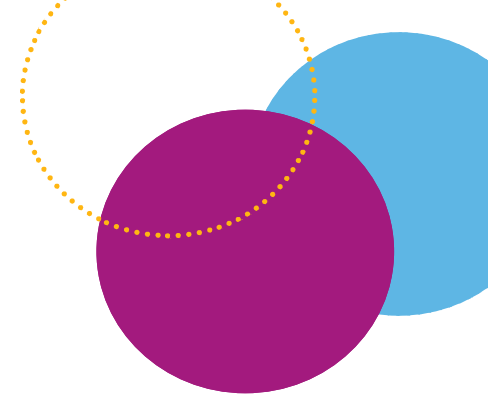
If your organisation involves volunteers on a regular basis, you may want to draw up a simple framework such as a volunteer policy, a charter or something which sets out the principles upon which your organisation involves and supports volunteers. This does not have to be a long or complicated document, and it can help to ensure that volunteers are treated consistently and fairly. For more guidance on creating a framework or policy suitable for your organisation, contact your nearest Volunteer Centre. Contact details are in **Sheet 18 'How can Volunteer Centres help?'**

SUPPORT is largely about encouragement and reassurance to the person:

- To focus on the volunteer as a person
- To listen, and create an environment where a volunteer is able to express him/herself
- To reassure where necessary
- To make sure the volunteer feels that their work is valued
- To be alert to possible changes or personal issues affecting the volunteer
- To give (and receive) feedback, both positive and negative – support does not exclude constructive criticism
- To pick up on any concerns or problems the volunteer has with their work and deal with them before they become more serious
- To assess training needs and facilitate personal development

SUPERVISION is largely concerned with the tasks being done by the volunteer and encouraging the person to be most effective in their volunteering role:

- To evaluate progress, set objectives and agree future action plans
- To give guidance in work based tasks
- To address any problems early and deal with them in a constructive way
- To make sure the organisation is accountable for the work being done
- To provide a forum for discussion, clarifying priorities, enabling decision making and agreeing on change



The balance between support and supervision, the level of supervision, and how closely you manage any particular volunteer, will depend on many factors, such as:

- How experienced the volunteer is and how long they have been with you;
- The role of the volunteer and the level of responsibility they have;
- The potential for things to go wrong (and how serious the problems could be);
- Whether they are doing work that needs to be monitored or which has to meet organisational targets;
- The personal circumstances of the volunteer;
- How often you are in contact with the volunteer and whether this contact is in person or by telephone, e-mail or post;
- What type of work they do and where (on-site, at a distance or in the community);
- How a volunteer currently feels about their role, the organisation, other volunteers and staff, and whether there are any issues of concern;
- The methods you use to supervise staff.

It may vary from person to person (some volunteers will come with more confidence or experience than others and some may need more encouragement or reassurance) and may change over time, e.g. as volunteers become more experienced, take on new roles, or if their personal circumstances change.

For low cost ideas to show your appreciation for volunteers see **Sheet 13 ‘Keeping volunteers’**, and for more advice or training on supervising, managing and retaining volunteers contact your nearest Volunteer Centre—contact details are in **Sheet 18 ‘How can Volunteer Centres help?’**