

Toolkit | Volunteers



Working with helpline volunteers

This toolkit is for organisations considering using volunteers as part of their advice or support line, telephone befriending service or webchat support.

With over 22 years' experience of working with and supporting the helpline sector, Helplines Partnership has created this simple toolkit.

It will help you consider the preparation you need to make and the processes to go through from recruitment to retention.

Working with volunteers

Volunteers play a vital role in supporting the work of many of helpline services but how do you attract new volunteers and keep your existing ones engaged, retained and motivated?

Why do people volunteer?

- For personal and professional development - to learn new skills and gain experience.
- To eventually gain paid employment or change career.
- For social reasons - they want to meet people.
- To give something back to society or the community and use their skills to help others.
- To contribute to a common goal for good.
- A belief in your organisation and what you do.

Getting ready for volunteers

- Be organised – make sure you have all your systems and procedures in place to give the volunteer a quality experience.
- Be clear about the role and support the organisation offers.
- Keep a clear distinction between employees and volunteers.
- Develop specific volunteer opportunities designed to increase volunteer confidence and connection to your organisation.
- Think about how you can show your appreciation for the volunteers giving up their time e.g. paying expenses, childcare, social events.
- Take part in awareness campaigns such as Volunteers' Week and Befriending Week and thank your volunteers for their input and time.

Key documents to have in place

- Volunteer role description and person specification
- Simple application form
- Volunteer agreement
- Volunteer policy
- Safeguarding procedure and policy
- Confidentiality and data protection policy

Recruiting volunteers

- Why do you need volunteers – prepare your case for support.
- Choose your channels to promote the roles. It's important to think about where your potential volunteers are likely to see your adverts.
- There are many channels including; word of mouth, Volunteer Centres, social media, local and national press, your website, specialist volunteering websites and events.
- The interview should be fairly informal but it is important to think about the questions you ask.
- Interview questions should include some around values and others to understand how potential volunteers learn and will respond in different situations.
- In the interview, explore the role and ask what the volunteer would like from the role.
- Record the answers to all your interview questions.
- Be prepared to say no. It is difficult but if someone isn't suitable, it won't benefit anyone. If you can, signpost them to other opportunities, rather than just rejecting them.
- If your helpline teams need DBS checks this must be built in to the recruitment process.
- You may need to be patient ... but keep going!

When the volunteers are selected

- Make sure you get references - two will be sufficient and in a simple letter format or phone call.
- Carry out a DBS check, if your organisation or the role requires it.
- If the person has been resident overseas for three months or more over the past five years, you should carry out an overseas check.
- Set a start date.
- Plan the volunteer's induction. It should cover all your policies and procedures including safeguarding.
- Plan your volunteer's training. You should have a clear plan to give them the skills and confidence they need to fulfil their role and think about how you measure competencies.

Provide on-going support

- It is important to have a volunteer co-ordinator or manager who understands the volunteer role, plans the rotas and can support on a day to day basis.
- Provide regular supervision and opportunity for feedback to assess satisfaction.
- Thank your volunteers for their support.
- Provide development opportunities.

Retaining volunteers

- You need to invest time and resources into volunteers. Relationships are key.
- Handle any problems or complaints from volunteers effectively.
- Set up buddy systems with existing volunteers supporting new volunteers as they join the team.
- Some volunteers will want to leave for various reasons. In most cases, they should be thanked and offered an exit interview as this gives them the full volunteer experience.

- Recognise volunteer's contribution and make them feel valued – say 'thank you.'

Sources of further information

You can find more information about working with volunteers on the following websites:

- [NCVO](#)
- [Volunteering Matters](#)
- [Reach Volunteering](#)
- [Association of Volunteer Managers](#)

Next steps

This toolkit is intended to help you consider what you need to think about to if you want to start working with volunteers.

A helpline is often the first point of contact for people desperate for help, making a brave initial step to get support. So it's important you have the right people with the right skills in place.

Contact us

If you have questions about working with volunteers, or want to learn more, talk to us about our specialist helpline training, consultancy services and membership.

Phone: 0300 330 7777

General enquiries

Email: info@helplines.org

Membership and Member enquiries

Email: membership@helplines.org

Training enquiries

Email: training@helplines.org



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