



fingal volunteer centre volunteer policy

Policy Statement

Fingal Volunteer Centre (FVC) exists to promote, support and encourage volunteering and good practice in volunteering in Fingal. We recognise that in order to achieve our goals we need to involve volunteers in our own work too. It is also essential that we present a model of good practice in volunteer management.

We regard volunteers as a valuable resource and encourage them to get involved at all levels of the organisation and within all appropriate activities. We aim to train, support and supervise our volunteers to the best of our abilities, and to act quickly and fairly if difficulties arise.

Procedural Guidelines

1. General principles

1.1 Purpose of document

The purpose of this internal document is to provide guidance on all aspects of volunteering at the FVC. It does not constitute a binding contract. It supplements other FVC policies and procedures, as well as our definition of volunteering, our mission statement and our value base.

These procedures apply to all non-elected volunteers who undertake tasks on behalf and at the direction of the FVC.

1.2 Responsibility

The FVC Manager is responsible for ensuring that the policy and the procedures in this document are implemented efficiently and effectively. All other staff and volunteers (including voluntary management committee members) are expected to facilitate this process.

1.3 Eligibility

FVC will consider involving anyone as a volunteer. Individuals must, however, be able to demonstrate a commitment to the aims of the organisation and may only be placed if their needs as volunteers match the needs of the organisation. No person who has a conflict of interest with any aspect of the organisation will be accepted as a volunteer. Voluntary management committee members may not undertake other voluntary work within the FVC itself, but will be encouraged and supported by FVC if they wish to volunteer elsewhere.

1.4 Relationship with paid staff

Volunteers are appointed to enhance the capacity of paid staff (including Community Employment workers), not as a substitute for them. Conversely, the FVC does not accept the services of its paid staff as volunteers. Clear roles are established to differentiate between paid staff and volunteers to foster mutually beneficial and complementary relationships.

1.5 Working conditions

Volunteers are treated as full members of the FVC team. They are treated as equally and fairly as paid staff and are included in the organisations functions and decision-making processes wherever practical. Volunteers are provided with appropriate work sites and have access to the space, equipment and facilities necessary to volunteer effectively and comfortably.

1.6 Volunteering times

Volunteering times are negotiated between the FVC Manager and the volunteer and are as flexible as the tasks allow. Voluntary time commitment is never expected to match that of full-time paid staff, but unscheduled absences can create organisational problems. When expecting to be absent, volunteers should inform their supervisor as soon as possible, so that alternative arrangements can be made.

1.7 Appropriate behaviour

Volunteers are expected to work within the policies and procedures of the FVC and adhere to its ethos. As representatives of the organisation, they are responsible for presenting a positive image of the FVC to the outside world.

1.8 Representation of the FVC

Volunteers must seek prior approval from the FVC Manager before undertaking anything that might affect the organisation. This includes, but is not limited to, statements to the press, joint initiatives with other bodies, and agreements involving contractual or financial obligations.

1.9 Confidentiality

The FVC respects the volunteer's right to privacy and confidentiality. In turn, volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all privileged information to which they are exposed while volunteering with the FVC

1.10 Records

A system of records is maintained on all volunteers, including dates and times of service, duties performed, evaluation of work, etc. Volunteer records are accorded the same confidentiality as staff records.

1.11 Service at the discretion of the FVC

Any voluntary service is at the discretion of the FVC. The FVC may, at any time, and for whatever reason, decide to terminate volunteers relationships with the organisation. Similarly, volunteers may at any time, and for whatever reason, decide to terminate their relationships with the FVC Notice of such decisions should be communicated at the earliest opportunity, preferably in writing.

2. Recruitment

2.1 Role descriptions and person specifications

Like paid staff, volunteers require a clear and accurate description of the tasks and responsibilities they are expected to undertake. Prior to any volunteer assignment or recruitment effort, a role description must be developed for each voluntary opportunity. This must include a title of the volunteering role, starting and finishing dates, hours and place of work, name of supervisor and tasks to be undertaken. If appropriate, a brief person specification may also be drawn up. The role description may be amended in joint agreement with the volunteer and the FVC Manager. A copy of the final version must be given to the volunteer before commencing voluntary work, as it will be used in supervision and evaluation sessions. Role descriptions must define a time limit (no longer than one year) for voluntary involvement, after which time they are reviewed, and updated if appropriate.

2.2 Applications

Volunteers are recruited on a pro-active basis by the organisation using publicity avenues that are suitable for the roles that need to be filled. Potential volunteers may also apply speculatively or come via the volunteer placement service provided by the FVC. Volunteers are recruited in accordance with the FVC's equal opportunities policy. All volunteers are required to complete an application form.

2.3 Interviews

If necessary, applications are short listed and suitable candidates are invited to attend an informal chat with the FVC Manager, to ascertain their interest in and suitability for the role. Written records of all interviews are kept. All unsuccessful candidates are thanked for applying and encouraged to reapply for other volunteering opportunities, either current or in the future.

2.4 Checks for suitability

References are always taken up. If the role requires it, health (mental and physical) are also undertaken. Other checks may also be completed (for example, ascertaining professional qualifications). Volunteers are always warned in advance of the intention to make these checks. If they refuse permission and cannot provide an acceptable reason, they will not be placed.

2.5 Appointment

Formal appointments are made only after the role description has been agreed and all necessary checks have proved acceptable. No placements are made unless the requirements of the volunteer and the volunteer's supervisor can be met.

2.6 Probation

All placements are subject to an initial trial period of one month. At the end of this period, the FVC Manager meets with the volunteer to discuss the volunteer's suitability for their role. At this point, volunteers may continue in their current role, be reassigned to a more suitable role, or be asked to leave.

3. Training

3.1 Induction

All volunteers receive induction when they begin voluntary work with the FVC. This consists of a general introduction to the organisation, as well as a specific orientation on the purposes and requirements of their volunteering role.

3.2 On-the-job training

Volunteers receive initial and ongoing on-the-job training to provide them with the information and skills necessary to perform their tasks well. The training must be appropriate for the demands of the position and the capabilities of the volunteer.

3.3 Additional training

Volunteers are actively encouraged to identify training courses, seminars, conferences, and so on, which would help them to perform their roles better and which would aid their personal development. Approval to undertake such training free-of-charge must be given by the FVC Manager and this will only be done if sufficient funds are available. Priority is given to long standing volunteers and those who have received little or no training in the past.

3.4 Training information

If additional training was paid for by the FVC, any course or other materials belong to the organisation and must be filed in the FVC office. All volunteers are required to submit a short report outlining the content and usefulness of the course or meeting attended. Training information must be disseminated to relevant people within the organisation.

4. Supervision

4.1 Lines of communication

Lines of communication should operate in both directions and should exist formally and informally. Volunteers must have access to all appropriate information, memos, materials and meetings relevant to their assignments. Volunteers must be consulted on all decisions that would substantially affect their volunteering conditions.

4.2 Supervisors

Each volunteer must have a clearly identified supervisor who is responsible for the day-to-day management of that volunteer. The FVC Manager normally takes on the supervisor's role, but all staff members receive training and guidance on how to involve volunteers effectively in the work of the organisation.

4.3 Supervision sessions

Volunteers receive regular appraisals of their work, based on their role descriptions. Evaluation sessions take place at least once a month between the volunteer and his or her supervisor. These review the performance of the volunteer, suggest any changes in work style, seek suggestions from the volunteer on means of enhancing the volunteer's relationship with the FVC, convey appreciation to the volunteer and ascertain the continued interest of the volunteer in serving in his or her role. The sessions also serve as an opportunity to plan future tasks.

4.4 Corrective action

If appropriate, corrective action may be taken following evaluation sessions. Examples include the organisation of training for an identified training need, the reassignment of a volunteer, or the dismissal of a volunteer.

4.5 Dismissal

Volunteers who do not adhere to the organisations rules or who fail to perform their volunteer assignments satisfactorily may be subject to dismissal. No volunteer's involvement will be terminated in writing until the volunteer has had an opportunity to discuss the reasons for possible dismissal with their supervisor. Grounds for dismissal include, but are not limited to, the following: gross misconduct, being under the influence of drugs (including alcohol), theft, misuse of equipment and materials, abuse of clients and co-workers, breaches of confidentiality, failure to abide by FVC policies and procedures and failure to complete duties to a satisfactory standard.

4.6 Concerns and grievances

If volunteers are not satisfied that issues relating to their volunteering are being handled appropriately, they are entitled to have their concerns reviewed by the management committee. The management committee will discuss the issue as soon as practical after receiving a written complaint, and take appropriate action. The chair of the management committee makes the ultimate decision.

4.7 Exit interviews

Where possible, informal exit interviews are held with any volunteers who are leaving the organisation, either because they have reached the end of their project, or are leaving for some other reason. Interviews are usually conducted with the volunteer's ex-supervisor and written records are kept. The session should ascertain why the volunteer is leaving, how they found the volunteering experience and what suggestions they offer to improve the way the organisation operates. The offer of a personal reference for future employment etc. is made to each volunteer.

5. Support and Supervision

5.1 Support

FVC endeavours to provide the support necessary to encourage and empower volunteers to make a meaningful contribution and gain significant benefits from their voluntary work. Support forms part of the regular supervision sessions and gives volunteers a safe setting in which to express themselves, let off steam and discuss how they feel about volunteering. The FVC manager will always try to be available to volunteers who require support in other areas that are affecting their performance.

5.2 Recognition

Volunteers provide a unique service to FVC, the benefits of which are difficult to quantify. It is essential that their efforts are recognised and rewarded. FVC staff are responsible for thanking all volunteers informally on a regular basis for the valuable contribution that they make to the organisation. The FVC Manager is responsible for ensuring that more formalised recognition takes place at key times.

5.3 Expenses

Volunteers give their time and skills free of charge, so it is essential that FVC offers to reimburse any out-of-pocket expenses they may incur in the course of undertaking voluntary work for the organisation. The costs of volunteering should never be allowed to discourage those on low incomes. Current rates and procedures for claiming expenses are agreed by the management committee and publicised to all volunteers.

5.4 Insurance

Insurance is provided by FVC to cover all volunteers working on behalf and at the direction of the organisation.

5.5 Personal and vocational development

Volunteers are encouraged to develop their skills while involved with the organisation and are assisted into assuming additional and greater responsibilities over time, if they desire this.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

6.1 FVC volunteer involvement

FVC monitors and evaluates volunteer involvement in the organisation on a regular basis and seeks to make ongoing improvements.

6.2 Feedback

Constructive feedback on this document is always welcome. It must be given to the FVC Manager who will ensure that it is considered fully.