A HANDBOOK FOR ORGANISATIONS THAT WORK WITH VOLUNTEERS IN DEVELOPMENT

Managing Volunteers: Placement and Support

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Introduction

The Global Volunteering Standard is a voluntary standard that seeks to promote continuous learning and improvement for volunteer-involving organisations. It is the result of a collaborative global effort over five years drawing upon the expertise and wisdom of several hundred people and organisations from 80 countries across the volunteering in development sector and beyond. We have aimed to capture and reflect our collective understanding of good practice throughout the volunteering programme cycle:

- **Designing and Delivering Projects**

- **Duty of Care**

- **Managing Volunteers**

- **Measuring Impact**

This manual is the third in a four-part series addressing the Managing Volunteers Theme within the Global Volunteering Standard. For key terms, please see our Definitions document and visit Forum's **Global Volunteering Standard Resource Library** for guiding documents and templates shared by volunteer involving organisations. The topics in this manual address how volunteers are recruited and selected, using consistent criteria, to fulfil the needs defined by the community.

Good Practice:

Use Forum's **Global Volunteering Standard Resource Library** to locate resources to complement this handbook by selecting the overall tag label **"Managing Volunteers"** as well as **"Placement and Support"**.

Clarifying Roles

MEETING THE STANDARD:

- Volunteers, partners and organisations review and sign an agreement clarifying roles and responsibilities and setting out the terms and conditions of partnership and placement.

- Volunteers understand the terms of their agreement and see them being applied consistently, transparently and equitably.

- Organisations provide ongoing support to partners and staff on safety and security, safeguarding, health, volunteer engagement, and volunteer management.

- Volunteers receive orientation, at the start of the placement, about the workplace, the local context, partners, and the community.

It is important for partners to understand both their own role and the roles of volunteers. In the same way that volunteers sign an agreement, so too should partners. This will help to manage expectations as well as outline respective roles and responsibilities, covering any relevant stages from needs assessment through to the end of the placement.

Organisational Role

Organisations provide ongoing support to partners and staff as well as volunteers on safety and security, safeguarding, health, volunteer engagement, management and well-being. Organisations are responsible for the development of job description, recruitment and training of volunteers. They should also be working to engage with volunteers throughout their placement, support them in reflecting on their experience and work to retain them as alumni, and even repeat volunteers. Organisations are also responsible to conduct due diligence in selecting partners and placing volunteers.

Tip:

The role of volunteers can go beyond the tasks at hand with the partners. It should also include communication and public engagement activities to support your organisation and help to recruit additional volunteers.

Volunteer and Partner Roles

To get started with a volunteering experience, it's important for the volunteer, partners, and your organisation to review and sign an agreement. Because there are three signatories, this is often referred to as a "tripartite" agreement. This agreement outlines everyone's roles and responsibilities, as well as the terms and conditions of the placement. Make sure to provide the agreement in the volunteer's preferred language, to ensure comprehension. In signing the agreement, everyone involved has a comprehensive understanding of the terms and will be expected to consistently and fairly apply them during the course of the placement.

Tripartite agreements help to define who is responsible for what, but also help to guide the development of work plans, complete reports and conduct performance reviews.

Agreements

To ensure cohesion between the three stakeholders, a tripartite agreement should also be signed following a three-way meeting. The purpose of the tripartite agreement is to accomplish the following:

1. All parties involved in the placement will collaborate in a transparent, courteous, and productive manner to establish an environment that fosters a successful placement.

2. Lay down the basic requirements that each party must adhere to and stipulate that if any party fails to meet these expectations, constructive feedback must be given by all parties involved.

3. Acknowledge that volunteers are essential to the success of your programs and that they are responsible to both their overseas partner organisation and your organisation for achieving programme goals and outcomes.

Good Practice:

You can find agreements by volunteer type in the **Global Volunteering Standard Resource Library** using the tag **"Placement and Support"**.

Placement Progress Review

- Volunteers and both partners review and sign off the placement description, objectives, and work plan at the start of the placement as part of the overall project plan.

- Organisations share with volunteers the results of their monitoring, including their performance and any identified outcomes of the placement.

- Volunteer's terms of agreement are benchmarked and reviewed on a regular basis.

The purposes of a placement progress review are multiple! You will want to promote communication and provide useful feedback about the volunteers' performance, to facilitate better working relationships, to provide a historical record of performance and to contribute to support learning and growth and to ensure adherence to a work plan.

Ongoing review allows volunteers and partners to revise the work plan based on the progress to date, the needs of the communities and participants and the partner as well as volunteer skills, interest and experiences. Although performance reviews can be conducted in various ways, it is good practice to have the volunteer self-reflect on their performance and to come together in-person or virtually between the volunteer and the partner to review the findings, and either agree on the reflections or discuss the discrepancies. Both parties should also sign off on the review and outline the next steps to be taken and the next performance review date. While formal reviews can be conducted annually, quarterly or even monthly check-ins would be good practice. This allows the organisation to review work plans, address any challenges and ensure cohesion on the way forward. Reviews can only be successful and have continuity after volunteers and partners revise and sign off on the placement description, objectives, and work plan at the start of the volunteer's placement. The signed reviews should be shared between volunteers, partners and organisations for learning purposes, clear understanding of any identified outcomes of the placement and for record keeping purposes.

Good Practice: Develop a template for a volunteer work plan. The work plan is meant to be beneficial to both the volunteer and the partner as it outlines the objectives and priorities of the placement, and the learning goals. Preparation, review and sign off should be conducted jointly. Work plans should be utilised as part of check-ins and performance reviews, and any revisions should be conducted jointly to ensure collaboration and understanding.

Work plan examples can be found in the **Global Volunteering Standard Resource Library** by searching for the tags: **"Preparation, Training and Learning", "Placement and Support"** and/or **"Reporting".**

Placement Progress Review for International Volunteer

Name: John Smith
Program: International Volunteer Program   **Partner Organisation:** ABC NGO
Placement Duration: 6 months   **Review Period:** Month 3

Overall Assessment:

John has demonstrated a strong commitment to his role as an international volunteer with ABC NGO. He has shown a willingness to learn and has adapted well to the local culture and work environment. He has built positive relationships with his colleagues and has made significant contributions to the organisation's programs and activities.

Areas of Strength:

- Strong work ethic and dedication to his role.
- Positive attitude and willingness to learn.
- Effective interpersonal skills.
- Ability to work collaboratively with colleagues and community members.
- Good organisational and time management skills.

Areas for Improvement:

- Further development of language skills to enhance communication with community members.
- Continued efforts to build relationships with stakeholders and community members.
- Increased focus on monitoring and evaluation of programme activities to assess impact.
- Exploration of additional opportunities to engage with the local community.

Volunteer Feedback:

- Finding it challenging to communicate with participants due to language barriers.

Next Steps:

- Attend language classes twice a week to improve communication skills.

Goals for Next Review Period:

- Establish regular meetings with key stakeholders to strengthen relationships.
- Develop a monitoring and evaluation plan for current programme activities.
- Participate in a community-based initiative to contribute to their development.

Supervisors' Comments:

Overall, John has made significant progress in his placement and is on track to achieving his objectives. We will continue to provide support and guidance as needed to ensure his success.

Professional and Personal Support

MEETING THE STANDARD:

- Organisations provide professional and personal support in response to volunteers' needs.

- International volunteers and national volunteers are given equitable attention.

- All volunteers are able to speak to a trusted member or staff about specific concerns they may have, leading to a support plan.

- Organisations exemplify good mental health practices in the workplace by following Duty of Care policy and procedures.

- Staff provide regular feedback acknowledging the contributions of volunteers and supporting ongoing learning and improvement.

The provision of proper personal, and professional support as well as implementation of your duty of care policies and protocols, helps to maintain all individuals involved in your organisations, your staff members, your volunteers, your participants and even the organisation itself. Helping to keep them focused on the tasks at hand, and helping them remain committed and determined, especially through difficulties. Providing support, whether physical, professional, personal, emotional, intellectual and/or financial can help them do their jobs more effectively, and comfortably.

Supporting volunteers means providing them with the right training, celebrating successes, supervising them properly and regularly, keeping their morale high, and making sure they have what they need to do their placements successfully.

Other reasons to support volunteers include:

- Maintaining a high level of morale amongst your volunteers.

- Preventing burnout.

- Showing appreciation.

- Keeping lines of communication open.

- Positioning your organisation in a positive framework to encourage future/return volunteers.

- Retaining exceptional volunteers and ultimately maintain and improve the quality of the service your organisation provides.

Pre-Placement Training

Professional support can look quite different, depending on the organisation, however, you should show your volunteers that you support them in their roles and responsibilities as outlined in the job description and agreement. For instance, involve volunteers in decisions that will affect them or their work. This way, you can help foster a sense of ownership that will enhance their connection to the work and to your organisation, as well as strengthening programmes by putting volunteers at the heart of decision-making. Identify additional tasks, events or activities that are of interest to them that they might be willing to take on or support. This shows them that you have listened and paid attention to their interests and are creating space for their participation. But it could also help them network, and add to their resume.

Some other examples of ways to support volunteers include:

- Providing pre-placement training and refresher trainings as required.

- Fostering personal initiative.

- Encouraging volunteers to share and pilot new and innovative ideas that might benefit your organisation and the community members you work with.

- Ensuring acknowledgement of their ideas and their efforts and recognize work well done.

- Applying organisational policies equally to everyone.

- Scheduling regular meetings with volunteers to celebrate successes, discuss challenges and foster a community amongst them.

- Having a mechanism to give regular feedback to volunteers regarding their work (this can include oral or written feedback, such as regular evaluations).

- Giving equal attention to international and national volunteers.

Personal Support

While volunteers have been recruited and placed to fulfil a mandate, they are also individuals with their own personal interests, hobbies, and so on. Therefore supporting their social and mental well-being should be of prime importance. For many volunteers this may be a new location or a new area of work and therefore it is important that they feel welcomed, valued and heard and have someone they can turn to for support. Therefore it is very important for your organisation to exemplify good mental health practices by following duty of care policies and procedures.

Simple yet effective ways to support volunteers can be by ensuring they have someone they can speak to, such as one of your staff members, about specific concerns they may have. Where some

issues cannot be resolved through conversation, a support plan should be developed with their inputs incorporated.

Depending on the type of volunteer that you are working with, you may also need to provide logistical support. This can be in the form of helping to open a bank account, get a driver's licence or some form of national ID, help find housing, provide language lessons, show them around markets and national dishes, pinpoint places of attractions and affordable places to eat, etc. A long term international volunteer will have different needs than a national volunteer who speaks the local language and therefore the support provided will need to be adjusted accordingly.

Tip:

Creating a buddy system for new and older volunteers, or with staff members that are open, approachable and personable. This can help volunteers get acclimated to their new location and organisation much better and more quickly.

Keeping People Safe

Following the recommendations above can go a long way to keep volunteers supported, but it is also important to ensure processes are in place to protect the health and safety of volunteers and those affected by their presence in the community. Here are some examples:

- As an organisation you should be providing emergency phone numbers and emergency contacts to volunteers and partners. Individuals within your organisation who are responsible to accept emergency calls should be properly trained on the protocols for addressing the various incidents, in keeping with the security plans, code of conduct and duty of care policies. The emergency calls need to be responded to in a timely fashion and issues addressed. Incident report completion and logging the phone calls should be part of standard practices.

- Volunteers should report safety and security incidents to you as the recruitment organisation, using standard incident reports.

- You should be reviewing protocols for safeguarding, incident management and health and safety on a regular basis and ensuring that all staff members and volunteers, as well as partners, understand and adhere to the code of conduct and follow safety and security guidelines.

- Additionally, to create a safe workplace, you have to consider the possibility of accidents, emergencies, and crime. You should regularly check the office space for electrical problems, broken furniture, etc., and fix the problems as soon as they are identified.

- Any safety issues that might affect people living with disabilities need to be dealt with in keeping with regulations and legislations and in accordance with your duty of care policies. It is important to work with individuals living with disabilities so that when policies and protocols are rectified they are involved in ensuring that the solution is feasible for them.

Your organisation should develop and make sure that everyone is familiar with emergency procedures, such as fire, flooding, and other incidents that are relevant to your specific context.

Tip:

Incident report examples can be found in the **Global Volunteering Standard Resource Library** by searching for the following tags: **"Safety and Security", "Safeguarding and Protection",** and/or **"Preparation, Training and Learning"**

Next Steps

This manual is only one of a series of guides outlining the sections of the Global Volunteering Standard. We encourage reading through the other guides for a holistic understanding of volunteer management.

For more information on the Global Volunteering Standard and access to the Resource Library, as well as an organisational Self-Assessment Tool, please visit the Global Volunteering Standard Platform: www.forum-ids.org/global-volunteering-standard-platform/.

To learn more about Forum or become a member, please visit www.forum-ids.org/. To share any feedback on the guide, please email globalvolunteeringstandard@forum-ids.org

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The International Forum for Volunteering in Development, commonly known as Forum, is a global network of organisations that work through volunteers to achieve sustainable development. Forum promotes more responsible and impactful volunteering by sharing information and good practice through convening, research, and the Global Volunteering Standard.

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