

Working with Volunteers for Community Gardens

Volunteers are crucial to running any charity-based organisation. Community growing spaces are often managed by volunteers, or they may work alongside paid staff to help maintain a growing space. If you intend to work with volunteers, there are things you need to consider to ensure they are protected, stay motivated and understand the needs of the project.

Recruiting volunteers

Some volunteer roles may require specific skills, so you will want to write a job description that attracts the right candidate. This will likely include trustee positions, as these roles will include managing the organisation. For instance, you may want to find a trustee with fundraising experience or a Treasurer.

You can also put a call out for general garden volunteers. You can advertise for volunteers through other local organisations, social media, job centres, posters on noticeboards or within your organisation, and by word of mouth.

Volunteer policy

A volunteer policy is required if you intend on recruiting volunteers. It will need to contain almost everything that would be in an employee policy. This will include:

- Principles and expectations
- Definition of a volunteer
- Volunteer recruitment
- Equal opportunities and diversity
- Task outlines
- Induction, support and training
- Insurance, health and safety
- Volunteer expenses
- Confidentiality
- Grievance procedure
- Problem solving process
- Holidays and sickness
- Volunteer records

It is also wise to have a volunteer agreement that outlines expectations; this will need to be signed by the volunteer and their line manager.

If a volunteer is required to work with children or vulnerable adults, then they will need to have an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check before they start work.

Volunteer induction

This will involve talking through information about the organisation, letting the volunteer know who will be managing them, collecting their contact details, explaining incident reporting, grievance procedures, and everything else included in the volunteer policy. They should also be given a copy of the volunteer policy to refer to if required in the future.

Health & safety

Ensuring health and safety is properly considered and adhered to is very important. It is good practice to train all garden volunteers in the use of tools and equipment, and to have a trained First Aider on site who can deal with any accidents or issues that arise. An emergency contact form should be filled

out by all volunteers, and you should also request any information about long-term illnesses or medication that the First Aider will need to be aware of.

An accident book is also required and all accidents, even if they are minor, should be recorded.

Volunteer Expenses

If volunteers need to travel to your site, then they may need help with bus/train fares or fuel expenses. You will also need to provide refreshments for your volunteers. If you are applying for funding, then remember to ask for volunteer expenses to cover costs.

Expectations

Volunteers will have been made aware by yourselves, what is expected of them and what rules of the organisation they need to follow. Volunteers will have their own expectations of what they will get out of their time spent at your organisation, which might include training, work experience, job references when required, confidence building and reduction in social isolation. Find out what their expectations are and work together to help achieve them.

Celebrate

Always thank volunteers for the work that they do, praise goes a long way. Take photos of their achievements and present them on social media. Why not have a celebration each year to say thank you for all your volunteers' hard work?