

Volunteer management

Supervising volunteers

Once you have recruited volunteers, your next task is to keep them coming back.

Supervision is an important part of this process, designed to create a respectful and honest relationship that prevents conflict, allows volunteers to flourish and improves the likelihood of retention.

Many people feel uncomfortable giving constructive feedback to volunteers who they deem to be 'doing us a favour'. Giving formal feedback to volunteers is often harder than to paid staff because of this fear of them leaving as a result.



Tips

The kind of supervision volunteers need will depend on:

- * how many volunteers are involved.
- * the nature of the role.
- * their motivation for volunteering.
- * their personality and circumstances.

If you are supporting a large number of volunteers, you may need to be resourceful when planning supervision. The definition of person-centred supervision allows you to be flexible and creative in your approach.

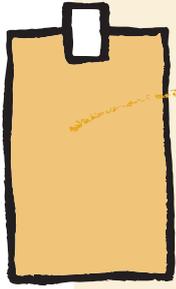
'Person-centred supervision is a partnership process that creates a respectful and supportive climate enabling people to understand and support each other well.'

Create a suite of supervision options that allows the nurturing of a respectful and supportive partnership between the organisation and the volunteer.

This suite of options may involve between 2 and 5 of the following:

- * Peer supervision - could be a senior volunteer providing supervision to other volunteers, a volunteer mentor role, or pairing like-minded volunteers for supervision sessions.
- * Group supervision - volunteers meeting as a group and working through supervision as a team.
- * Closed social media groups (Facebook or Google+) - may include questions or discussion topics posted to a closed group.

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Tips

- * An open door policy - encouraging volunteers to chat informally.
- * Confidential feedback boxes - can promote honest feedback. It is vital that issues are addressed and responded to promptly.
- * Surveys - should be administered via a variety of methods, e.g. SurveyMonkey and/or hard copy.
- * Debriefing sessions - a more formal approach usually implemented after significant events.

Consider using the 'what's working/what's not working' tool as an approach to one-on-one, group-based and/or online supervision.

This is an analytical tool that looks at a snapshot in time from multiple perspectives. It is a way to work through performance management or conflict with a partnership approach. It assists in learning what is working and not working for the volunteer, builds on what is working and allows for change to what is not working.

It can be used:

- * in an overall appraisal context, e.g. what is and what is not working in relation to the volunteer's position description.
- * as an ongoing feedback tool, e.g. a simple question asked at the end of each month.
- * for a specific issues e.g. if a volunteer has breached confidentiality.

Ensure you offer your volunteers a blank template with instructions and ask them to think about their response in a reasonable amount of time.

e.g.

A young volunteer was expressing stress and anger around others, and from all reports she was extremely unhappy in her role and with the organisation. She was asked to participate in a formal discussion where the tool 'what's working/not working' was used.

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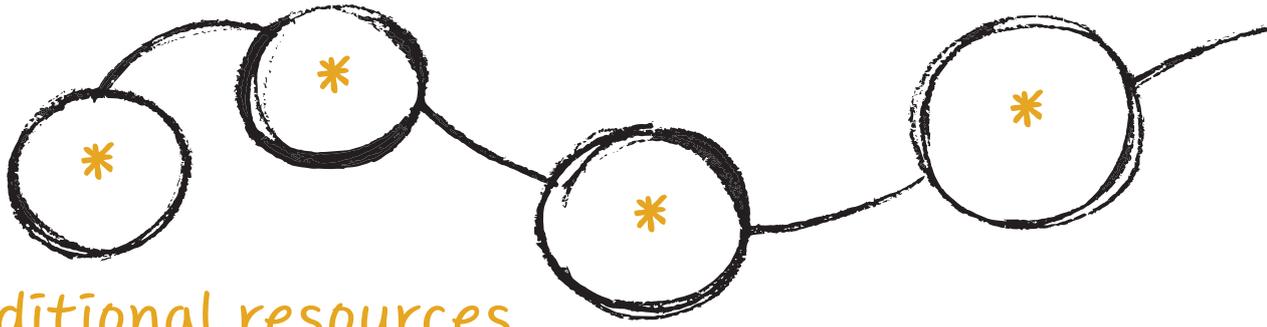
Because the meeting began with what was actually working for both parties, she and the supervisor realised that the volunteer passionately loved the organisation, wanted to make it work and that only small changes were necessary. They both contributed to an action plan and were happy with the outcomes.

Consider using the '4 + 1 questions' tool with a group of volunteers. This tool will assist you to reflect on what has been happening and what has been learned in any situation. It acknowledges what has been working well and provides the opportunity to discuss any worries or issues and then to develop an action plan. It allows people to feel listened to without one dominant voice taking over, and promotes positive actions.

Using the '4+1 questions' tool will enable the manager or supervisor and volunteer to focus on any ongoing issues the person has been struggling with. You can use the questions to support them to reflect on past efforts before settling on actions.

Use the 'praise and trouble' tool if you need to learn more about the type of feedback the volunteer values while gaining a better understanding of how to provide constructive criticism. This can be a useful tool to open up conversation on expectations and feedback within volunteer roles.

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Additional resources

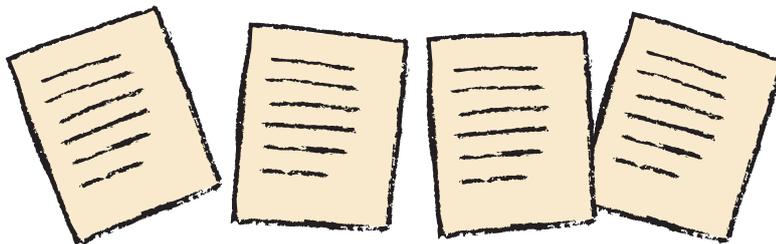
- * The Workforce Capability Framework.
- * The disability career planner and capability framework implementation guide.
- * Technique – using ‘what’s working/not working’ in performance planning, support and supervision.
- * Technique and template – using the ‘praise and trouble’ the in supervision.
- * Tips – using the ‘stress and support’ tool in supervision.

Definitions

The term **individual(s)** refers to an individual with a disability and their family and/or circle of support.

The term **staff/employees(s)** refer to paid members of the organisations workforce. Employment relationships with the organisation may be permanent, casual, full-time, part-time, etc.

The term **volunteer(s)** refers to an unpaid individual willingly giving their time to provide a service or support.



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