GOOD PRACTICE

Top tips: Managing staff and volunteers in community businesses

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SUPPORTING RURAL COMMUNITY BUSINESS

Plunkett Foundation

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power to change | business in community hands

Community businesses typically recruit large numbers of volunteers to look after day-to-day operations, often with very few paid staff. Community businesses have a duty of care to both paid staff and volunteers, and this factsheet outlines good practice when it comes to managing people in paid or voluntary roles in your community business.

1. **Know your legal obligations -** Employment law covers paid employees and workers, but for the most part doesn't cover volunteers. However, remember that legal requirements in the **Equality Act 2010** and the **Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation) (GDPR)** apply to everyone.

2. **Foster good working relationships -** For both paid staff and volunteers it is important to maintain good working relationships – you're more likely to retain both staff and volunteers if they feel valued. Communication is key – be open and transparent about how the business is doing, why decisions are made, and explain changes before they are implemented. This will engender trust and encourage your staff and volunteers to be open with you, too.

3. **Establish policies and procedures -** Having robust policies and procedures in place will help you to deal with any issues that arise fairly and consistently across the board – whether dealing with paid staff or volunteers. It is good practice to have the following policies and procedures in place as a minimum: Discipline and Grievance Policy; Absence or Attendance Policy; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. These are recommended because they are the areas in which the most common complaints and issues arise. Example policies are available on the **ACAS website**, but ensure they are relevant and specific to your business; ensure they are accessible and in plain English; and be clear on who they apply to.

4. **Use job and role descriptions and evaluate performance -** Paid staff should have a clear job description, outlining the duties they will be required to undertake; volunteers should have a role description, clearly describing the expectations of the tasks a volunteer will be involved in. This helps to avoid any confusion, ensure both volunteers and paid staff understand what you want them to achieve, and also allows you to establish a timetable to monitor, review and evaluate performance.

5. **Make time for training -** Whether in paid or voluntary roles, it is important that your staff have the right training to enable them to fulfil their duties. This could include, but is not limited to, health and safety training, food hygiene certificates, GDPR and data privacy training, customer service skills and business-specific training on the systems and processes that you have in place. Ensuring you have a training plan in place will help to fill any skills gaps that your staff or volunteers may have, and help to prevent problems from arising in future.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about significant challenges to the day-to-day operations of community businesses, with requirements for additional risk assessments, policies and procedures to follow in the case of a volunteer testing positive for Covid-19, and a duty to protect those volunteers who may be more vulnerable. However, it has also brought opportunities, such as the potential to recruit new volunteers as people are furloughed or not commuting to work or to cover new and diversified services. Important considerations relating to managing volunteers during the Covid-19 pandemic include:

1. Ensure you have a specific Covid-19 risk assessment in place, in line with government guidance. This should include cleaning, handwashing and hygiene procedures, social distancing, and other methods of managing transmission risk such as providing face coverings for volunteers. HSE guidance around Covid-19 risk assessments is available **here**.

2. If you have volunteers that are deemed vulnerable, you should ensure they don't feel compelled to continue their roles as normal if it isn't safe to do so. Take into account each individual's circumstances, and discuss specific risks with your volunteers to help them to make informed decisions. Volunteers who are considered to be clinically vulnerable (aged over 70, pregnant or with an underlying health condition) should take particular care when choosing to leave the home, however there are no specific restrictions on them volunteering.

3. Ensure you have a clear policy outlining the procedures you will follow should a volunteer report that they are experiencing coronavirus symptoms or have had a positive test result, and that you share this with all staff and volunteers. The individual should follow current government guidance regarding self-isolating, and you should support the NHS Test and Trace system, ensuring any close contacts follow guidance on self-isolating if they are advised to do so. In addition, consider the procedures you'll follow for cleaning and disinfection in the case of a positive test, to protect staff, volunteers and customers. Further information on cleaning in non-healthcare settings can be found **here**.

4. Consider whether there are opportunities to recruit new volunteers to further support your community, or to replace volunteers who may be shielding. With more people staying in their local area, and the heightened community spirit we have seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, the potential volunteer force is much wider. Encouraging young people to volunteer locally could help you to extend your opening hours, resource packing and delivery services, or offer additional services such as prescription collection and delivery. Furthermore, could you benefit from the different skillsets new volunteers could offer? Volunteers could help to improve your digital presence across social media, or carry out other tasks to support the promotion of your services such as graphic design or product photography. The charity Volunteering Matters offers some good tips on recruiting volunteers **here**.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Are there minimum and maximum ages for volunteers?

There are no legal guidelines on minimum and maximum ages for volunteers – and setting them would contravene the Equality Act 2010, which prevents discrimination on the grounds of age.

No matter what their age, if you're recruiting volunteers you should take into account their individual needs. For example, a health and safety risk assessment may be required for older volunteers if their role involves manual handling of boxes of stock; safeguarding regulations should be considered if you work with volunteers under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults.

How can we reward volunteers for the work they've done?

Any reward that could be considered to have monetary value should be avoided, as this could be seen as payment for work completed. In this case, the volunteer would be classed as a 'worker' and may be entitled to National Minimum Wage and other employment rights. Further information can be found here: **https://www.gov.uk/volunteering/pay-and-expenses**

As committee members are volunteers, should they be treated the same as the shop/café volunteers, as in receiving training, being issued with policies and procedures?

Yes, definitely! Being a member of a management committee for a community business requires a range of skills and knowledge. The Plunkett Foundation have a number of webinars and resources around roles and responsibilities of committee members and induction packs here: **https://plunkett.co.uk/information-hub/**

Where would you recommend advertising roles when recruiting volunteers and committee members?

There are a variety of channels available to help you reach potential volunteers. Having a role description is useful in attracting new volunteers, as it helps them to understand what they're signing up for. Channels that other community businesses have found useful include: the **NextDoor** app, posters in local libraries and train stations, links with the local council, local Facebook groups, local volunteer action groups and personal contacts/face-to-face approaches.

Are volunteers protected under public liability insurance?

Employers have a duty of care for volunteers and if you're recruiting volunteers you should ensure they are protected against injury and illness. This usually falls into either public liability insurance or employer's liability insurance, depending on your insurance policy. If you're unsure, speak to your insurer or broker for clarification.

USEFUL LINKS AND FURTHER SUPPORT

- Guidance around employment rights for volunteers is available on the NCVO website: **https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/tools-resources/volunteers-and-the-law/employment-rights**

- ACAS offer a range of advice around employment and good practice at www.acas.org.uk and also a free helpline for employers and employees on **0300 123 1100**

- Plunkett Foundation members can speak directly with an ACAS adviser who understands community businesses; contact **membership@plunkett.co.uk** for more details

- For further advice and resources around volunteer management, and template policies and procedures, visit **https://plunkett.co.uk/thrive-resources/**

- If you'd like to speak to an adviser who understands the intricacies of volunteers in community business, contact the Plunkett Foundation advice line on **01993 810730**

- The charity Volunteering Matters offers a range of resources to help ensure people are volunteering safely in the community. Find out more here: **https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/volunteer-safely/**

- The Covid-19 Mutual Aid UK network helps to organise local volunteers to support the most vulnerable in our communities, and offers a range of resources for local groups and communities. Visit **https://covidmutualaid.org/** for more information.

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