

Volunteers have high hopes and expectations when they sign up to volunteer. It's important that organisations address their needs and expectations, starting with making them feel welcome on the first day. Properly preparing for a volunteer's first day will ensure they immediately feel part of the team, allay any nerves they may have and help you to retain your volunteers.

Prepare for the Volunteer's First Day

After the initial interview, your volunteer will be excited at the prospect of starting out on a new endeavour. The first day's experience with your organisation will have a lasting impact and will influence their commitment and behaviour within the organisation in the future.

The Greeting

Welcome the volunteer warmly. Make sure everyone the volunteer is likely to come into contact with knows they are arriving including the receptionist. It's amazing how motivating it is to feel expected and welcomed by everyone!

Tour of The Premises

New volunteers need to get their bearings in an unfamiliar environment. Begin your tour with the volunteer's own workspace and point out where colleagues work and what they do. Show the volunteer where coats and personal items can be left, where the bathroom is, where the first aid box is located and where to get tea/coffee. Depending on the role, you may need to demonstrate the use of basic office equipment such as the phone system, photocopier and fax machine.

Initial Assignments

Nothing says "we need and value you" more effectively than having prepared work to do right away. This allows volunteers to quickly identify how they can contribute to the organisation. Conversely, having the volunteer wait while you "pull something together to keep them busy" sends quite the opposite message. Set tasks that allow the volunteer to ease into things, whilst providing enough work to fill the shift.

Induction and Training

The amount of training volunteers need will depend on the role and their experience. Regardless, all volunteers require an induction. When planning an induction process, revert back to the role description, reiterate the tasks and outline your expectations. Many organisations choose to create an induction pack to bring volunteers up to speed on all aspects of the organisation.

Don't Assume Knowledge

Gauge the level of support or assistance required to get your volunteer up and running quickly. Spend plenty of time with your volunteer on the first day (or assign another person who is available) and expect lots of questions! This is important in creating a relaxed rapport and building a good working relationship.

Formal Orientation

Volunteers are ambassadors for your organisation and they need to understand and be able to communicate what your organisation is all about. A formal orientation should ideally occur within the first few weeks. Orientation usually includes a full tour of the organisation, an overview of its history, the importance of confidentiality, a description of all services provided and how volunteers contribute to their successful delivery. Understanding the big picture and feeling part of the organisation is greatly motivating. This can be done on an individual basis or as a group, if more than one volunteer has been brought on board recently.

The End of the First Day

Be present to review the volunteer's work. Give some positive feedback. If there was a hiccup or two, explain what was done wrong and how to correct it. Remind the volunteer that they are still in training and practice makes perfect. Confirm the next time they are due in and express appreciation at having a new member on the team. Such courtesies are not just for show: they encourage your volunteer to return again and again.