



PLACE
The Architecture and Built Environment Centre
for Northern Ireland

Volunteer Involvement Policy

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Preamble

PLACE's mission is to positively influence the creating and sustaining of excellent places and buildings, making Northern Ireland an environment of exceptional quality for all.

The value of volunteers to organisations has been recognised for a long time. To achieve PLACE's goals, therefore, the management board has sought the participation of interested volunteers who can help build bridges between PLACE, the community and academia. To this end, PLACE accepts and encourages the involvement of volunteers at all levels within the organisation and within all appropriate programmes and activities, with a distinct and complementary role alongside paid staff. All staff members are encouraged to assist in the creation of meaningful and productive roles in which volunteers might serve.

Through its Volunteer Involvement Programme, PLACE also hopes that volunteers, students and the community will benefit in a variety of ways. To facilitate this, PLACE will provide opportunities for personal development and meaningful pursuits, as well as social and professional experience. For example, student volunteers completing a work placement with PLACE will gain valuable skills, knowledge and experience that cannot be achieved from academic study alone.

PLACE is committed to Equal Opportunities and equates its Volunteer Involvement Programme to empowerment within the organisation, academia and local communities. Further, PLACE recognises that the success of the organisation is built on the contributions made by individual strengths and differences and seeks to harness and respect these.

Volunteers in PLACE: a definition

A volunteer is someone who, without compensation or expectation of compensation, contributes time, energy and talents directly to, or on behalf of, the organisation. PLACE welcomes the contribution of three types of volunteer:

- students working on internal projects, exhibitions, community projects and administration
- members of the community who can liaise between PLACE and the community; help staff events; work with placement students in order to get community perspectives; and help with administration
- voluntary management board members.

Purpose of the Volunteer Involvement Policy

The purpose of the Volunteer Involvement Policy is to provide overall guidance and direction to staff and volunteers engaged in volunteer programmes and management endeavours. The Policy outlines (i) management of the Volunteer Involvement Programme; (ii) volunteer rights and responsibilities; (iii) volunteer recruitment, selection, placement and review; (iv) day-to-day supervision of volunteers; (v) volunteer training development; (vi) supervision; and (vii) support and recognition. It is intended for internal management guidance only and does not constitute either implicitly or explicitly, a binding contractual or personal agreement.



Management of the Volunteer Involvement Programme

The management of the Volunteer Involvement Programme will be an additional duty of the manager of PLACE. If, in the future, the Programme grows beyond this resource base, a dedicated volunteer manager may be appointed or assigned.

(i) Role of the manager

The productive use of volunteers requires a planned and organised effort. The function of this role is to provide a central point for effective volunteer co-ordination within the organisation, and to direct and assist staff and volunteer efforts jointly to provide appropriate services. The manager will:

- liaise with educational institutions offering programmes in art, planning, and architecture that require a work placement as part of their curriculum
- be aware of, and actively assist, community-wide efforts to recognise and promote volunteering
- carry primary responsibility for:
 - assisting staff members to identify productive and creative volunteering roles
 - recruiting suitable volunteers
 - effective volunteer deployment
 - tracking and reviewing the contribution of the volunteers to the organisation
 - carrying out an annual review of the PLACE Volunteer Involvement Programme. This will include information gathered from volunteers, staff and any other relevant persons in contact with the volunteers.

Scope of volunteer involvement

Volunteers may be involved in all programmes and activities of the organisation and serve at all levels of skill and decision-making. Volunteers may not, however, be used to displace any paid employees from his or her position.

(ii) Volunteer rights and responsibilities

Volunteering with PLACE involves rights for the volunteer; and the volunteer's responsibilities toward the organisation.

Rights

All volunteers have the right to:

- be given meaningful assignments
- be treated as equal co-workers
- have effective supervision
- enjoy full involvement and participation
- receive recognition for work done
- be reimbursed for appropriate expenses on production of receipts
- decide, for whatever reason, to sever their relationships with PLACE. Notice of such a decision needs to be communicated as soon as possible to the manager.

Responsibilities

On the other hand, volunteers:

- will agree to perform their duties to the best of their abilities and to remain loyal to the values, goals and procedures of PLACE
- will take responsibility for the accurate completion and monthly submission of timesheets and description of work completed
- are authorised to act as representatives of PLACE as specifically indicated
- need to seek consultation and gain approval from appropriate staff members and/or manager prior to any action or statement, that might significantly affect or obligate PLACE. These actions may include, but are not limited, to:
 - public statements to the press
 - lobbying efforts with other groups or organisations



- collaborations, joint initiatives or any agreements involving contractual or other financial obligations.
- are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all proprietary or privileged information to which they are exposed whilst serving as a volunteer, whether this information involves a single member of staff, volunteer, other person, or involves the overall business of PLACE. Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in termination of the volunteer's relationship with PLACE or other corrective action.
- are expected to perform their duties on a regular, scheduled and punctual basis. When expecting to be absent from a scheduled duty, volunteers need to inform their staff supervisor as far in advance as possible so that alternative arrangements may be made. Continual absenteeism will result in a review of the volunteer's work assignment or term of service.

(iii) Volunteer recruitment, selection, placement and review

Volunteers are selected on their suitability in relation to the needs of PLACE at any given time.

Recruitment

Volunteers will be recruited by PLACE on an on-going basis, with the intent of broadening and expanding the volunteer involvement of the community and learning institutions. The organisation wishes to see all sections of the community represented, therefore:

- volunteers will be recruited under the Royal Society of Ulster Architects' Equal Opportunities Policy (ie: without regard to gender, disability, age, race, sexual preference, marital status or with/without dependents). The sole criteria for volunteer recruitment will be the suitability to perform a task on behalf of PLACE
- volunteers will be recruited either through an interest in specific functions or through a general interest in volunteering, which will later be matched with a specific function.

Selection process

Prior to being assigned or appointed to a position, all volunteers will be interviewed to make sure of their suitability for, and interest in, that position. Interviews need to:

- consider the volunteer's suitability
- find out the volunteer's commitment to carrying out the requirements of the position
- answer any questions that volunteers may have about the job
- be conducted in person or by other means.

Wherever possible, staff members who will be working with the volunteer should participate in the design and process of the interview. Final assignment of a potential volunteer will not take place without the approval of the appropriate staff member/s with whom the volunteer will be working.

Volunteering with PLACE will begin with an official notice of acceptance to a volunteer position. Only the PLACE manager may offer such notice.

Once the volunteer has been accepted for a position, s/he will receive a volunteer manual containing:

- a written letter of welcome
- information about the aims and mission of PLACE
- volunteer rights and responsibilities
- statement of insurance cover
- contract of service with PLACE.



Placement

In placing a volunteer, attention will be paid to the interests and capabilities of the volunteer and to the requirements of the volunteer position. Accordingly:

- placement will be made only when the requirements of both the volunteer and the supervising staff can be met
- positions will only be offered to suitable and interested volunteers.

Reviews

It will be the responsibility of each staff member in a supervisory relationship with volunteer/s, to be involved in all reviews and decision-making with regard to all volunteers with whom they work. Reviews will include:

- an examination the volunteer's performance of her or his responsibilities
- a discussion of any suggestions that the volunteer may have concerning the position or project with which the volunteer is involved. The evaluation session is an opportunity for both the volunteer and the organisation to examine and improve their relationship.

Specifically, reviews will entail:

- looking at the performance of the volunteer, suggesting appropriate changes in work style
- seeking suggestions from the volunteer on how to enhance his or her relationship with the organisation
- conveying appreciation to the volunteer
- finding out if the volunteer continues to be interested in serving in his or her position.

(iv) Supervision of volunteers

Each volunteer accepted to a position with the organisation will have a clearly identified supervisor who:

- is responsible for day-to-day supervision and guidance
- will be available to the volunteer for consultation and assistance.

Staff members supervising volunteer/s are responsible for:

- maintaining regular communication with the manager on the involvement of the volunteers they are supervising
- immediately informing the manager of any substantial change in the work or status of a volunteer
- consulting with the manager in advance of any corrective action
- maintaining a system of records for each volunteer that will include:
 - dates of service
 - hours worked
 - duties performed and
 - reviews.

Lines of communication

Volunteers are entitled to all necessary information pertinent to the performance of their work assignments. Accordingly, volunteers will be included in, and have access to:

- all appropriate information
- memos
- materials
- meetings relevant to the work assignments.

Primary responsibility for ensuring that the volunteer receives such information will rest with the staff member supervising the volunteer. Lines of communication will



operate in both directions, and will exist formally and informally. Volunteers will be consulted regarding all decisions that substantially affect the performance of their duties.

Dismissal of a volunteer

Volunteers who do not adhere to rules and procedures of the organisation, or who fail to perform their volunteer assignment satisfactorily, may be subject to dismissal. No volunteer will be dismissed until s/h has had an opportunity to discuss the reasons for possible dismissal with supervisory staff. Grounds for dismissal may include, but are not limited to:

- gross misconduct or insubordination
- being under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- theft of property or misuse of the organisation's equipment or materials
- abuse or mistreatment of clients or co-workers
- failure to abide by the organisation's policies and procedures, and
- failure to perform assigned duties satisfactorily.

Exit Interview

Exit interviews, where possible, will be conducted with volunteers who are leaving their positions. This interview will find out about:

- why the volunteer is leaving his or her position,
- any suggestions that the volunteer may have for improving the position s/he has been fulfilling
- any suggestions for how the functioning of the wider organisation could be improved
- the possibility of involving the volunteer in some other capacity with PLACE in the future.

(v) Volunteer Training and Development

Induction

All volunteers will receive induction covering:

- the nature, aims and mission of PLACE
- the nature and operation of the Volunteer Involvement Programme
- the nature and operation of the programme for which they have been recruited
- specific induction on the purposes and requirements of the position that they are accepting.

Training

Volunteers will receive specific training to provide them with the information and skills necessary to perform their volunteer assignments. The training and methods for delivery of this training will be appropriate to the complexity and demands of the position and the capabilities of the volunteer.

Staff involvement in induction and training

Staff members with responsibility for the delivery of services will have an active role in the design and delivery of both induction and training of volunteers. Staff members involved in a supervisory capacity will have primary responsibility for design and delivery of on-the-job training to the volunteers assigned to them.

(vi) Volunteer support and recognition

Access to PLACE's property and materials

Volunteers will have access to the organisation's property and materials necessary to fulfill their duties. They will receive training in the operation of any equipment. Property and materials will be used only when directly required for the volunteer task.



Insurance

Liability and accident insurance is provided for all volunteers engaged in the work PLACE.

Volunteer-staff relationships

Individual staff members are in a good position to consider the requirements of their work and their own abilities, therefore, volunteers will only be assigned to work with a staff member when his or her consent has been given. Also, because volunteers are a valuable resource, staff members are encouraged to consider creative ways that volunteers can be of service to the organisation.

Volunteers and staff members are partners in implementing the mission and programmes of PLACE, each having an equal and complementary role. It is essential for the effective operation of this relationship that each partner understands and respects the needs and abilities of the other.

All staff members who are responsible for volunteer supervision are encouraged to undertake methods of recognition of volunteer service on a regular basis throughout the term of volunteering. These methods of informal recognition range from a simple 'thank you' to a concerted effort to include volunteers as full participants in decision-making and implementation of projects that involve the volunteer. The manager will also provide a written reference when the volunteer leaves PLACE.

(vii) Review of the Volunteer Involvement Policy

The Volunteer Involvement Policy will be reviewed as and when required. The Manager of PLACE also reserves the exclusive right to change any aspect of this policy at any time and to expect adherence to the changed policy.

Information contained in this document has been adapted from:
Brighton Hove Volunteers (<http://www.brightonhovevolunteers.org.uk/goodpractice>)
Volunteer Development Agency, Belfast (2007)