

Orientation and Training

Why is it Important?

The volunteer orientation establishes the nature of the new relationship you are beginning between your organization and volunteers. It is your chance to make sure that all the volunteers know your organization's mission, what you are about, and what you expect from them. Remember that once a person works as your volunteer, they represent your organization. You cannot always watch over them or correct their mistakes. Therefore, you need to make sure they fully understand your organization so that they characterize your organization and its work accurately.

For volunteers, the orientation is both a way to feel confident about what they have committed to and a way to prepare to do their work. They learn how what they will be doing fits into the bigger picture of everything the organization does. They learn how decisions are made and what it will feel like to be a part of this group.

For orientation, we recommend setting at least a few hours aside and providing some drinks and snacks. We also hand out a short manual for volunteers with all the information they hear in the orientation, for future reference. This way, they cannot say you did not tell them anything!

Orientation Agenda

We suggest that you design an orientation in which everybody feel involved. You can include the following content:

1. **Getting to know you:** A chance to break the ice, for each person to introduce him or herself, and learn who is in the room.
2. **Overview:** A history of the organization, the mission, and the programs; the schedule for the orientation.
3. **Discussion:** Some group discussion of the issues with which the organization deals, and what the organization's views or philosophies are on those core issues.
4. **Policies:** An overview of your organization's policies (on sexual harassment, anti-discrimination, how to handle conflicts, etc.) and volunteer policies (volunteers should call the team leader if they have to cancel, no talking to media on behalf of the organization, no plagiarism, etc.).
5. **A team-building game:** To practice and get a feel for what working together as a team is like.
6. **Getting down to business:** We always end the orientation with a short ten-to-fifteen-minute team meeting in which the volunteers talk about what they will do in the next week on their projects. In this way, the meeting ends with everyone feeling energized about the future. If your volunteers will need to learn to do special tasks, or need special knowledge, you may wish to set up a separate time to train them.

Keeping Track of Time

If you have set a scheduled time, always try your best to finish within that time. Volunteers have other commitments in their lives, including work, school and family. By sticking to the schedule, we show that just as we expect volunteers to respect their time commitment to the organization, we will also respect their time. If it looks like a meeting may run late, we stop and ask everyone if they have time to stay for another half hour. If that is inconvenient for the majority of people, we reschedule the meeting for another time. This helps to build trust and mutual respect with your volunteers.