

## **PROJECT FOOD – VOLUNTEER POLICY & HANDBOOK – 2020**

### **Introduction & Scope:**

Project Food recognises the valuable role that volunteers play in achieving our Mission which is to enable people in the South West to improve their diet, so they enjoy better physical and mental health.

This policy & handbook reflects our commitment to ensuring that our volunteers are valued and integrated into the heart of Project Food and that volunteering with us is a rewarding experience and that all volunteers are treated in an equal, fair and just manner.

This policy & handbook sets out to provide guidance to staff and volunteers and outline procedures and support mechanisms available to our volunteers. It defines the term “volunteer” and provides a framework of best practice which we will endeavour to follow when appointing, managing and supporting our volunteers.

### **Definition of the relationship:**

Volunteers are individuals or groups who offer their time, experience, knowledge and skills without financial gain beyond reimbursement of reasonable expenses; helping us to achieve our Vision and Mission.

There is no contract of employment between Project Food and its volunteers and volunteers are not considered employees of Project Food.

### **Project Food’s Commitment to our Volunteers:**

Project Food recognises that its success will be supported by enthusiastic and committed volunteers. We recognise the skills, knowledge and experience our volunteers bring to our organisation and that volunteers are a valuable resource. We are committed to providing support and recognition for their contribution and input so that they understand the difference they make to our organisation.

Project Food aims for high standards and we encourage our volunteers to do the same. We aim to ensure you have a clear understanding of your volunteering role, the organisation’s structure and how your volunteering make a difference to us achieving our Vision and Mission. Volunteers will be supported to complete their activities with an induction and appropriate training and a supervision commitment.

Our volunteers have the right to refuse any request made of them in relation to carrying out their volunteering activities and are not bound by contract, but are asked to volunteer in line with our volunteer strategy, this policy & handbook, their volunteer agreement and role profile.

### **Commitment of our Volunteers:**

Project Food wants volunteers to behave in a way that reflects positively on our organisation and promotes our core values of commitment, support, respect, inspiring others and excellence. We also want our volunteers to promote the key messages of our organisation and carry out their activities in line with the role profile and at the request and guidance of their supervisor. Project Food wants volunteers to be supportive of staff, other volunteers and of Project Foods Vision and Mission.

We ask that all volunteers offer their time on a regular basis and, where possible, inform us in plenty of time if they are considering leaving their volunteering role. We also ask that volunteers keep themselves up to date with what's going on at Project Food as well as attending occasional training and communication events aimed at keeping them well informed and up to date with current practice and legislation in the relevant areas where they volunteer.

There are a number of policies and procedures in place to support volunteers within Project Food and we ask that you uphold these and keep yourself up to date with them to ensure we are complying with legal and statutory obligations and volunteering best practice.

### **Principles:**

This Volunteer Policy & Handbook is underpinned by the following principles:

- Project Food will endeavour to ensure volunteers are properly integrated into the organisational structure; that they are kept up to date with organisational developments and that necessary mechanisms are in place for them to make a valuable contribution to our work;
- Project Food will not introduce volunteers to replace paid employees;
- Project Food recognises that there are a number of reasons why people volunteer and we will do our best to help you meet these needs by ensuring you have satisfying work and personal development opportunities, as well as opportunities to interact socially and build social networks;
- Project Food employees will be expected to interact positively and respectfully with all volunteers;

### **Recruitment & Selection:**

Project Food will aim to follow best practice recruitment and selection for volunteers which is designed to ensure that we recruit volunteers who are suitable for the role they have asked to do:-

- Project Food will provide volunteer role profiles which outline the activities and responsibilities, together with skills and experience that are beneficial for the role. We will also give an estimate of the time commitment required;
- Before appointment, volunteers are invited to take part in a 2-way discussion about the volunteering role; its requirements and expectations and the relevant experience and suitability required;
- Commencement of the volunteering opportunity is dependent on receipt of satisfactory references and, if required, a relevant Disclosure & Barring Service check;
- Volunteers will be subject to a probationary period of 1-3 months depending on the regularity of the volunteering and will meet with their supervisor at the end of the probationary period for a discussion to ensure that the volunteering needs are being met for both the volunteer and Project Food;
- Support, guidance and supervision will be provided and we will agree with you how this will take place;

### **Induction & Training**

All volunteers will receive a general orientation on the nature and purpose of the organisation as well as task specific training to ensure they can carry out their role on behalf of Project Food effectively.

### **Support:**

All volunteers will have a named supervisor who is there to provide guidance and assistance. Those engaged in more regular volunteering will have more formal supervision sessions at agreed intervals. These sessions will be conducted in a variety of ways, depending on suitability and appropriateness and may include; email, phone, face to face, skype, zoom or similar, as agreed.

Supervising employees will review the volunteering placement regularly, but at least once a year, with the aim of ensuring that we keep pace with the role development. The primary purpose of these sessions is for communication, to keep in touch, share information, listen to your feedback and check that all is well with your volunteering and, if appropriate, to offer development opportunities.

At times when life is challenging, we want to support you, so please let us know if you are experiencing difficulties as we may be able to help you.

### **Communication**

We will aim to keep you informed and updated with information on updates and changes within Project Food; new activities and initiatives as well as reliable information about health eating and food.

We will use a variety of ways to do this including emails, our website, social media including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as well as mobile phone text and posters. Please make every effort to keep yourself up to date and keep us informed of your current contact details.

To keep costs to a minimum, our preferred communication is email. If you do not have access to the internet or email, please let us know and we will do our very best to keep you informed by alternative methods.

### **Recognition:**

It is important to us that volunteer contributions are recognised and valued, and we will do this in a number of ways. For example, invitation to special events such as Christmas and Summer party or other social event; opportunities to get involved in the strategic direction of the organisation by giving feedback when invited about the future of the organisation and volunteer involvement.

We also recognise that some volunteers are with us to improve their experience and learn new skills to help with future employment opportunities and we are happy to provide a reference or confirmation of volunteering commitment for those who have volunteered over a sustained period if this is helpful.

### **Safeguarding & Disclosure of Criminal Records:**

Project Food is committed to practices which safeguard our clients and our volunteers accept and uphold these responsibilities. Therefore, many of our volunteers are subject to a criminal record disclosure (DBS) as part of the recruitment process. Project Food complies fully with the code of practice provided by the Disclosure & Barring Service and undertakes to treat all volunteer applicants fairly in line with our commitment to equal opportunities and to comply with the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

### **Equal Opportunities & Diversity:**

Project Food is committed to promoting equality of opportunity. Volunteering opportunities at Project Food are open to all regardless of age, race, disability, ethnic origin, gender, marital status, nationality, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity. Project Food

recognises the positive benefits that a diverse volunteer pool can bring to the organisation and is committed to ensuring our recruitment and selection procedures reflect this.

### **Confidentiality:**

Volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all information, sensitive or otherwise to which they are exposed. Confidentiality and discretion are important elements of our work and our core values of respect and commitment mean that we take confidentiality very seriously. Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in termination of the volunteer's relationship with the organisation.

Our volunteers often represent us in a number of different ways and settings. However, no comments, stories or personal information should be given to third parties, the media or others unless you have specific permission to do this as part of our volunteering. Positive personal use of social media to share the activities of Project Food is encouraged. However, any contact with these forms of social media or publicity material must be positive and appropriate and in no way defamatory to Project Food, its volunteers, staff or clients.

You should be aware that in the course of your volunteering with us, that your photograph or image may be taken and used in promotional materials by Project Food. If you do not wish to appear in promotional material, please tell us, in writing, to the Project Manager as quickly as possible.

### **Data Protection:**

### **Health & Safety:**

Project Food is committed to providing an environment which is safe for staff, volunteers, visitors, customers and clients. Any activities carried out on a voluntary basis will be covered by the same health & safety requirements as those carried out by staff.

During your induction period you will receive relevant information and training (where relevant to your volunteering role) about health & safety. You will also be made aware of the relevant risk assessments and other relevant health & safety or food safety information. Please make yourself aware of the relevant information and if you have any queries or concerns, please discuss these with your supervisor or the Project Manager.

### **Accidents & First Aid:**

If you have an accident or are injured during your volunteering, you should immediately inform your supervisor or the Project Manager. All accidents must be recorded in the Accident Book (provided at the Axminster Hub). Any injury should be assessed and treated appropriately by a first aider. It is important that you make yourself aware of the first aid provisions at the location where you are volunteering.

### **Insurance:**

All volunteers who are registered with Project Food and acting on our behalf and with our permission will be covered in the course of their volunteering by our public liability insurance, details of which can be obtained from the Project Manager or found on the noticeboard at the Axminster office.

You should be aware that Project Food does not accept responsibility for loss or damage to clothing or personal items bought with you to your volunteering. We recommend you insure your belongings appropriately.

All volunteers organising an event for the general public must deal with health & safety issues as a matter of course. We have provided a checklist and information pack for this purpose and if you are organising an event on our behalf, you must complete the standard risk assessment provided. If you have any questions about this matter, please speak to the Project Manager in the first instance.

### **Volunteer Expenses:**

In line with best practice, Project Food's policy is that volunteers should not be out of pocket as a result of their volunteering.

We are therefore happy to reimburse reasonable receipted travel and subsistence costs. Minimising costs allow us to maximise income for Project Food's valuable work and therefore Project Food asks that volunteers keep expenses to a reasonable and necessary level. Below is guidance on what constitutes reasonable expenses and the procedure for re-claiming these. At the request of the volunteer, expenses can be donated back to the organisation, the tax on which can then be reclaimed through Gift Aid.

If volunteers have any queries with regard to expenses, they should talk to the Project Manager before any expense is incurred.

### **Travel & Subsistence:**

Travel expenses are paid either at the mileage rate of 45p per mile plus reasonable car parking charges, or bus or train fare. Permission for travel must be agreed with the Project Manager before it is undertaken.

Subsistence is not usually paid but can be assessed on a case by case basis.

### **Procedure for Claiming Expenses:**

Reimbursement of agreed travel expenses can be made on production of a relevant receipt to a member of staff in the Axminster office.

### **Concerns & Complaints:**

Project Food is committed to creating a place where people can work and volunteer together in a positive way to achieve our mission and we want to create a culture that is respectful and collaborative and demonstrates our values. We want to ensure that concerns that are brought forward early so they can be resolved informally and without causing disruption to the smooth running and harmony of the organisation.

In the unlikely event that a dispute cannot be resolved informally, the Project Manager will be involved and the formal procedure at the end of this Policy & Handbook will be used.

Complaints of a serious or potentially criminal nature will, of course, be treated with the upmost sensitivity and may require further investigation and formal action.

### **Leaving your volunteering:**

We understand that you may want to move on from your volunteering with us at some point. When you do this, we ask that you give us as much notice as possible so that we can find someone to take over your activities. We will also want to gather your feedback so that we can continue to improve our volunteering experiences and your honest views at this time would be much appreciated.

**Lastly, and most importantly...**

**The support of our committed and enthusiastic volunteers means that Project Food can deliver its important work to those that need it; they can receive the vital skills & knowledge for health so that they can enjoy better physical and mental health.**

**Thank you**

## **VOLUNTEER COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

We encourage all concerns or complaints to be dealt with informally in the first instance by talking to your supervisor or the Project Manager. However, where there are serious concerns or complaints or the informal route has been exhausted, then this formal Complaints Procedure should be used. We will take the matter seriously. We will take a solution focused approach and encourage all parties to seek to compromise where possible.

The issues should be set out clearly and respectfully in writing and addressed to the relevant person or if this is not appropriate, the Director. Details of the concern or complaint together with examples should be given to add clarity.

### **Concerns, Complaints or Problems**

This procedure is in two parts, Section 1 relates to complaints about a volunteer and Section 2 relates to complaints by volunteers.

Underpinning principles:

- The informal stage will be carried out first unless the complaint is so serious that it requires immediate formal action, for example inappropriate behaviour or harassment, theft, substance abuse or a safeguarding concern (this list is not exhaustive);
- When a complaint is made, the person should know the details of the complaint about them;
- The person should be given an opportunity to offer an explanation and to put their version of events and any evidence before any decision is made;
- Any complaints meeting will be fair and conducted free of bias;

### **Section 1 – Complaint about a volunteer**

If the complaint is considered to be serious, Project Food reserves the right to suspend the volunteer from attending whilst the complaint is being investigated.

Within 5 working days of receipt of the written complaint, Project Food will meet with those involved to investigate the complaint and give the volunteer an opportunity to respond.

As a result of the meeting and the information gathered, a decision will be made. There will be 3 possible outcomes and the volunteer will be informed, either:-

- That no further action is to be taken;
- If the complaint is upheld, a written warning regarding the complaint will be issued to the volunteer with required changes clearly described;
- The volunteering arrangement will be ended;

### **Appeals**

The volunteer has a right to appeal against the decision within 7 days of the decision being informed to them. The appeal should be made in writing to the Managing Director explaining the reasons for the appeal.

Within 5 working days of receiving a written appeal, the Managing Director or their authorised representative, will investigate the details and arrange a meeting to discuss the appeal.

There will be 2 possible outcomes of this Appeal:-

- The decision of the complaint is not upheld, and the volunteer is re-instated; or
- The complaint is upheld, and the volunteer arrangement is ended;

The decision of the Managing Director (or their authorised representative) is final.

## **Section 2 – Complaint by a volunteer**

The complaint should be made in writing to the Project Manager. The complaint should set out clearly and respectfully, giving specific relevant examples so that the issues can be understood.

Within 5 days of receipt of the written complaint the Project Manager will arrange a meeting with the volunteer to investigate the basis of the complaint.

As a result of this meeting and the information gathered, a decision will be made. There will be 2 possible outcome and the volunteer will be informed either that:-

- No further action will be taken;
- The complaint is upheld, and further investigation will be undertaken. If the complaint is against another volunteer, Section 1 of this procedure will be followed. If the complaint is against an employee, formal procedures under the ACAS Disciplinary Code of Practice may be used.

As described above, we will do our very best to resolve any concerns, complaints, or problems and if you experience any problem during your volunteering, please talk to your supervisor or the Project Manager.