



# Working Safely with Volunteers

Volunteers in the arts sector can take on roles from office administration, production and catering to planning and running events. In any of these cases, there is potential for accidents and injuries to occur: when health and safety aren't considered and planned for, these risks may be even greater.

## Employment Standards: Definition

Volunteers are persons who choose to provide services for non-profit organizations or charities for which they do not expect compensation. In a profit-based organization, any person allowed, directly or indirectly, to perform work normally done by employees is considered to be an employee, not a volunteer.

## Think about it

*(adapted from the Volunteer Arts Network)*

- Do your volunteers use paints, thinners or glues?
- Do your volunteers work with children and youth?
- Are your volunteers involved with crowd management?
- Do your volunteers work with machinery, power tools or vehicles?
- Do your volunteers prepare and/or serve food or hot beverages?
- Do your volunteers move heavy items?
- Do your volunteers drive for your organization?

Under the law, individuals (including volunteers) are personally responsible for their actions and behaviour. However, organizations also have a legal and moral responsibility to anticipate and promote a reasonable level of safety in their volunteer programs.

## What can you do?

*Prevention* – Preparing for accidents or injuries before they occur protects both volunteers and your organization from harm. The best thing you can do for your

organization is to plan ahead for the health and safety of volunteers, participants, staff and board members.

*Minimizing Harm* – No matter how prepared you are, accidents can and do happen. But preparedness can help to minimize the frequency of accidents and extent of potential injuries, as well as to guide your organization in the steps following an incident involving your volunteers.

*Liability Reduction* – Being informed of legal rights and responsibilities, and investigating insurance options, can be instrumental in helping to protect volunteers, employees and your organization from potential issues of personal and institutional liability. Consider the legal status of your organization as well. Incorporation status partly defines who may be at risk of being sued for negligence: the organization, its officers or staff members, or volunteers themselves.

*Training and Orientation* – Providing your volunteers with appropriate training and orientation will reduce the risk of injury or incident. Ensure volunteers receive the information they need to work safely and how to obtain help in an emergency. For the purposes of Due Diligence, ensure that you document the training and orientation.

## Things to consider

### Conduct a health and safety risk assessment

Are there practical or environmental hazards in your work environment? Identify and eliminate or reduce the risk of hazards in your environment. See page 4 of this infosheet. You are responsible for providing a safe environment for your volunteers and employees.

### Develop health and safety policy and procedures for volunteers in your organization

Decide what policies and procedures are important for



your organization, write them down and distribute them to your staff and volunteers.

### **Develop site-specific emergency procedures**

Refer to the SHAPE Infosheet on Workplace Emergency Preparedness, and familiarize your volunteers with these procedures. The Infosheet is available on our website. Request free fill-in-the-blanks Emergency Procedures and/or Emergency Information posters from SHAPE.

### **Implement a Volunteer Agreement and write descriptions of volunteer positions**

Ensure that volunteers and your organization have a mutual understanding of expectations. You can help to clarify volunteer roles with concise descriptions of each position. See Policy Sample #1: Code of Conduct on page 3 of this infosheet.

### **Provide volunteers with supervision and management**

Ensure that each volunteer is assigned to a supervisor who understands the health and safety protocol for your organization.

### **Insure your organization**

*Liability insurance* – discuss your use of volunteers with your insurance company and purchase at least the minimum recommended liability coverage.

*Vehicle insurance* – The Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) outlines guidelines and options for third-party liability, in the event that volunteers are asked to drive as part of their duties. For example, ICBC states clearly that “most Commercial vehicles must be insured for at least \$1 million Third-Party Legal Liability, and \$2 million if they carry dangerous goods.”

All volunteers who transport clients in their own vehicle should be required to submit a copy of their driving abstract (a prior driving record of violations and accidents), driver’s license and evidence of insurance before beginning their volunteer assignment, and on an annual basis thereafter.

Driver’s abstracts are provided free of charge. Individuals can obtain a copy of their driver’s abstract free of charge via fax or mail by calling the Driver Licensing information phone line at 604-661-2255 (Lower Mainland), 250-978-8300 (Greater Victoria), 1-800-663-3051 (all other locations), or by visiting a Driver Licensing office. Only the license holder can request a copy of his/her driver’s record. For more information see [www.icbc.com](http://www.icbc.com).

Special consideration for insurance may be required for new drivers, or drivers with a past record, or in the event that children are present in the vehicle. When asking volunteers to drive, familiarize yourself with the specifics of your situation (who is driving, whose automobiles are being used, and for what purpose) and ensure that personal or company vehicles are fully insured for your purposes. See Policy Sample #2: Car on page 3 of this infosheet.

### **Special Consideration**

*Special Events and Episodic Volunteers* – For special events, and other cases in which volunteers are engaged on a short-term and/or temporary basis, there may be lack (or shortened duration) of screening and training. Ensure that all volunteers are provided with a basic orientation of the site and their duties, and familiarized with the health and safety procedures of your organization.

*Youth* – Youth may require special consideration for positions appropriate to their age and level of development. In addition, from a liability perspective, children and youth lack the legal status of adults under 19 years of age. Consider adopting a standard consent form for parents and guardians of young volunteers to sign.

*Activities requiring Certification* – such as driving a forklift require certification. Identify any activities which require specific skills or training and ensure the appropriate volunteers are placed in those positions.

## Health and safety policies samples

These and other volunteer policy samples are available at the Volunteer BC website at: [www.vcn.bc.ca/volbc/riskmanagement/](http://www.vcn.bc.ca/volbc/riskmanagement/)

Sample #1: Code of conduct / volunteer agreement / volunteer contract

### Sample Wording

“The following guidelines have been incorporated into policy to ensure the smooth running of the organization and the protection of clients, volunteers, staff and Board members. All volunteers are required to sign the code of conduct/volunteer agreement and abide by the letter and spirit of the policies.”

### Why?

Often organizations emphasize and highlight some of the key policies (confidentiality/commitment) in a separate written agreement also known as a code of conduct or volunteer contract.

A written statement of values, beliefs and guidelines creates a level playing field (everybody is aware of the information).

### Key issues/procedures

- Develop/review code of conduct with input from staff, volunteers and clients where appropriate.
- Incorporate content in orientation and/or training to ensure complete understanding.
- Ensure that every volunteer completely understands the policies and implications prior to signing the code/agreement.
- Don't be afraid to explain the rationale behind certain policies to illustrate its importance; you have them for a reason (if you cannot explain them, it's time for a review).

Sample Policy #2: Car use

### Sample Wording

“All volunteers who transport clients in their own vehicle are required to submit a copy of their driving abstract (a prior driving record of violations and accidents), driver's license and evidence of insurance before beginning their volunteer assignment, and on an annual basis thereafter”.

Volunteers will only drive clients in an insured and properly maintained vehicle. Volunteers will at all times obey all traffic regulations and abstain from driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs or under any other kind of impairment (health/exhaustion).

Note - If driving children: By law, (Canadian Motor Vehicle Act Regulations), drivers must ensure that all infants and children are properly secured in certified child restraint systems. Never place a child or an infant restraint in front of an air bag. All children under 12 should be properly restrained in the back seat of the vehicle.

### Why?

Volunteers driving on behalf of your organization are in a high risk position. It's important to be very thorough in your procedures.

### Key issues/procedures

- Gather relevant information on insurance and ask volunteer drivers to submit a driver's abstract.
- Do you accept newly licensed drivers?
- Request the volunteer to provide proof of insurance, valid licence and driver's abstract.
- Review volunteer agreement with volunteer to emphasize specific policies related to safety (seat belts, obeying traffic laws), drugs and alcohol.

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### Note: The □

of qualified professionals. Furthermore, this publication does not replace the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation administered by the WorkSafeBC. Employers and workers should always refer to the Regulation for specific requirements that apply to their activities.

## Health and safety risk assessment

It's important to do your risk assessment on site, looking at activities as critically as possible. Walk through the site, identifying how activities will be carried out and identify any potential hazards.

1. Identify the hazards associated with the work activities.
2. Identify those who could be harmed by those activities.
3. Identify what you are currently doing to manage the risk and what further steps might be required to reduce the risk further. These are your control measures.
4. Record the findings of your assessment and inform those at risk of the controls.
5. Review the risk assessment on a regular basis e.g. if the activity, or the equipment used change.

When deciding on your control measures the following principles should be applied in the following order:

1. **Elimination:** Can the risk be avoided or eliminated?
2. **Substitution:** Can less hazardous materials or different work practices be substituted?
3. **Engineering Controls:** Can the process or task be redesigned to reduce exposure to the hazard?
4. **Administrative Controls:** Can a task be planned and organized to reduce the risk?

The provision of personal protective equipment (and the associated information, instruction and training) should always be considered as a last resort and only after the above controls have been considered.

## Generic risk assessment form

This list is intended to assist you in identifying the hazards involved in the activity. It is not exhaustive and is intended as a guide only. Any other hazards identified should be added to the list below.

A template risk assessment form can be found on the SHAPE website: [www.shape.bc.ca/resources/forms.html](http://www.shape.bc.ca/resources/forms.html)

### Equipment:

- |                                               |                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Display Equipment    | <input type="checkbox"/> Portable Staging   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Workplace Transport  | <input type="checkbox"/> Stairs/Guard Rails |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hand Tools           | <input type="checkbox"/> Fork Lifts         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Equipment |                                             |

Others: \_\_\_\_\_

### Workplace:

- |                                          |                                          |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heating         | <input type="checkbox"/> Ventilation     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Access & Egress | <input type="checkbox"/> Obstructions    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slips & Trips   | <input type="checkbox"/> Lighting        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Storage         | <input type="checkbox"/> Edge Protection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Routes  | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire            |

Others: \_\_\_\_\_

### Physical:

- |                                       |                                          |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vibrations   | <input type="checkbox"/> Manual Handling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sun Exposure | <input type="checkbox"/> Repetitive Work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heat Stroke  | <input type="checkbox"/> Hydration       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noise        |                                          |

Others: \_\_\_\_\_

### Substances:

- |                                     |                                   |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fumes      | <input type="checkbox"/> Dust     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flammables | <input type="checkbox"/> Asbestos |

Others: \_\_\_\_\_

### Processes:

- |                                          |                                   |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work at Heights | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoors |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|

Others: \_\_\_\_\_

### Work Organization:

- |                                  |                                                |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Driving | <input type="checkbox"/> Violence & Aggression |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|

Others: \_\_\_\_\_

Completed By: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

