

Volunteer Firing

Firing a volunteer is never easy. Many people are confused about why anyone would fire a volunteer in the first place. After all, someone is volunteering his or her time to your organization – firing doesn't seem like the right thing to do! Unfortunately, there are times when firing a volunteer is the appropriate – and only – thing to do. Consider a situation when a volunteer steals money from your organization or sexually harasses another volunteer. Most people will agree that these examples should result in the volunteer being immediately released from service. However, what happens when a volunteer doesn't do their assigned work, or misses several assigned shifts or important meetings? In this situation your organization isn't performing at the level that it could be and the work isn't getting done. Both your organization and your volunteers suffer because someone has to pick up the slack for the volunteer who isn't doing the work. We recognize volunteers for their good work, and we should hold them accountable when their work fails to meet expectations.

When a decision has been made to fire a volunteer, a volunteer firing meeting must take place. It is important that the Volunteer Manager (Main Street Manager) and another staff or board member attend this meeting with the volunteer. The volunteer firing meeting should be conducted in a private setting and must be handled with the same care and respect as a paid employee firing meeting to preserve the volunteer's dignity.

When firing the volunteer be clear about the reason for firing. Thank the volunteer for his or her service and pay any compliments that the volunteer deserves. Remind the volunteer of previous attempts to correct the problem. Avoid using words such as “tend” and “often” as they may confuse the volunteer, especially when you have just thanked him or her for their service.

After you have stated your decision, the volunteer may try to negotiate a way to stay with the program. At this point you cannot negotiate, you have come to a decision and you must stick with it. The volunteer may also feel the need to vent. Allow the volunteer to talk, but do not respond. When the volunteer has finished venting, collect any keys, uniforms or other materials, thank the volunteer for his or her service and ask the volunteer to leave.

It is very important to follow this meeting with a letter stating the reason for the firing. Keep a copy of the letter for your records. However you decide to reprimand your volunteers, we recommend having a written policy and including it in your volunteer policies and procedures, which all of your volunteers should receive an opportunity to review. Your policies should be consistently enforced in all cases with all volunteers. In addition, your legal counsel should always review any policies and procedures for your volunteer program.

Sample Wording for a Volunteer Firing Meeting

“Joe, in spite of your dedication to our Main Street, you did not show up for your assigned shift on March 3rd. As we discussed in our previous meeting on February 18th, failing to show up or to notify us if you are unable to report for your assigned festival shift has resulted in us having to replace you, and consequently we are taking you off of the volunteer team. Thank you for your service.”

Sample Volunteer Firing Meeting Follow-up Letter

Dear Mr. Smith,

Thank you for your interest and involvement in our Main Street. We appreciate your time volunteering as an event booth attendant. This volunteer position is extremely important for our organization as it is the face of our Main Street, and your energy and knowledge of the program really helped get our message across.

We are disappointed that your schedule did not allow you to volunteer for your assigned shifts. As we discussed in our meeting on March 5th, we need to seek a replacement for your position and take you off of the volunteer team. Thank you again for your service.

Sincerely,

Insert Your Name

Insert Your Title