

INTRODUCTION

The Hong Kong Volunteer Charter (the “Charter”) was drawn up by the Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS) in 2011 on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of International Year of Volunteers proclaimed by the United Nations. It has been widely made known to volunteers and volunteer-involving organizations in Hong Kong. The Charter stipulates the essence and values of volunteerism, benchmarks volunteer practice and sets out the service environment facilitating volunteering.

In pursuit of quality practice and professionalism in volunteering, AVS compiles the Practice Reference Guide (the “Guide”) as a complement to the Charter, to provide practical guidance for volunteers and volunteer-involving organizations (VIOs). As with the Charter, the Guide applies to both situations where a person volunteers on one’s own to serve direct another person in need (informal volunteering) and where one enrolls as a volunteer with an organization which arranges or provides service opportunities for volunteers (formal volunteering).

The Guide is not a manual for managing volunteers. It is prepared primarily from the perspective of volunteers performing their roles in different context and covers detailed volunteering guidelines and the expectations of volunteers in working with VIOs and the service recipients. Volunteering with proper support ultimately will bring greater benefits to all parties concerned. Set out below are the different sections of the Charter and the corresponding contents of the Guide.

I. VOLUNTEERISM



【Hong Kong Volunteer Charter】

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1

Volunteerism is universal by nature regardless of culture. It brings to life the noblest aspirations in the pursuit for universal values such as human dignity and justice.

2

Volunteering is a process people engage in to serve others or society, out of love and free will, with no expectation of any materialistic return.

3

Volunteerism is manifested through participation to serve, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, creed, ability or social status.

- Volunteers understand and embrace universal values such as love, justice, human rights and dignity in the practice of volunteerism.
- Volunteering involves willingly providing service without expectation of any materialistic return.
- Everyone has the potential to volunteer regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, creed, ability or social or other status.
- Volunteers help others nurture the spirit of volunteerism.
- Volunteering is serving others or acting for the well-being of society. It may take different forms i.e. formal or informal, and through different actions such as mutual-aid, self-help, philanthropy, service to others, research, community participation, civic engagement, advocacy or campaigning.



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1 Love
Volunteerism springs from universal love, love for life and for wholeness of humanity. Volunteers offer compassion for the wellbeing of others and of society.

2 Human Dignity
Volunteerism respects human dignity, and recognizes the intrinsic rights of human beings: civil, social, political, cultural and economic.

Volunteers respect the rights of service recipients; likewise, volunteers are entitled to their dignity and right in servicing.

3 Free Will
Volunteerism is free expression of care for others or for society.

Volunteers spontaneously come forward to serve, and are not compelled to act against their will.

- Love is caring for others, giving and forgiving.
- Volunteers recognize and respect the uniqueness of each person.
- Volunteers treasure, respect and care for life, humanity and the environment
- Respect for human rights and dignity is fundamental to volunteerism.
- Volunteers treat others, including service recipients, as equals and do not act with a sense of superiority. They appreciate the rights and dignity of others.
- Volunteers endeavour to understand the needs and rights of service recipients. They serve in ways which take into account the rights and dignity of service recipients and of others working together.
- The rights and dignity of volunteers in serving are likewise respected.
- Volunteers serve in a responsible manner, according to their own will and abilities. Volunteers resist temptation or coercion, and act in ways which are consistent with the spirit of volunteerism.

For formal volunteering:

- Volunteers have the right to decide whether to continue the service if the terms of the assignment with VIOs have been changed.



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Service

Volunteer will offer their time and ability to serve with no expectation of any materialistic return, but for the wellbeing of service recipients and of society.

Volunteers will be prepared to undergo orientation or training to enhance their knowledge and skill.

Volunteers will endeavour to be flexible to cope with changing requirements or circumstances.

Volunteers will meet their service goal and complete their assignment for formal volunteering.

- Volunteers deliver services wholeheartedly and according to plans.
- Volunteers persist in volunteerism and seek to attain professionalism in volunteering.
- Volunteers update their knowledge and skills regularly to enhance performance in service.
- Volunteers seek to increase the effectiveness of services. Volunteers are ready to share knowledge, skills and experiences.
- Volunteers participate in activities for advancement of volunteering.
- Volunteers terminate services when the services are no longer needed or wanted.

For formal volunteering:

- With the agreement of VIOs, volunteers will be flexible in entertaining different needs as the situation arises.
- Volunteers welcome feedback from VIOs on their performance for service improvement and professional advancement.
- Volunteers do not change the service plans without good reasons and consent of VIOs.
- As agreed with VIOs, volunteers may be provided or reimbursed for out of pocket expenses when providing services.



【Hong Kong Volunteer Charter】

2

Responsibility

Volunteers will understand and will be committed to what they do, and fulfill what they set about to undertake.

Volunteers will appreciate their own competence to deliver the expected outcome before committing to serve.

Volunteers will be responsible and accountable for their own action, and will observe the policies and guideline of VIOs for formal volunteering.

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- Volunteers shall acquire / be provided with sufficient information on the nature, objective / goal, process and the expected outcome of the service such that they could assess their physical, mental and emotional fitness before committing to take on the service.
- Volunteers are punctual, and fulfill the working hours that have been agreed to.
- Volunteers duly inform service recipients their status of being a volunteer, their names, positions, and service roles.
- Volunteers consider any possible negative effect that may result from their actions including their withdrawal from service, and endeavour to minimize such negative effects.
- Volunteers refrain from proceeding to service if they suffer from a contagious disease; and for formal volunteering, inform VIOs immediately.
- If service recipients are injured in the course of service, volunteers immediately inform all relevant parties, including co-volunteers, to address the problem; and for formal volunteering, VIOs, and where appropriate, the police.

For formal volunteering:

- Volunteers carry out the duties assigned or listed in the job description provided by VIOs.
- Volunteers need to be familiar and in agreement with the objectives and values of VIOs.
- Volunteers do not withdraw from service without prior notice to VIOs.
- Volunteers give notice to VIOs as early as possible if they are not able to attend to duty.



【Hong Kong Volunteer Charter】

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3

Compassion

Volunteers will be considerate and empathetic, aspiring to improve the conditions of service recipients or of society.

- Volunteers try to understand the thinking and feelings of service recipients. Volunteers are sensitive and will attempt to accommodate the recipients' emotion.
- The interests of service recipients are of paramount importance unless safety, respect or rights of others may be jeopardized.



【Hong Kong Volunteer Charter】

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Respect

Volunteers will respect all stakeholders, and in the case of service recipients, their freedom of choice as well, without discrimination for reason of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, creed, ability or social status.

Volunteers will interact as equal with other volunteers, service recipients and staff of the VIO for formal volunteering.

Volunteers will respect the customs, norms and laws of where they tender service.

- Volunteers are polite and pleasant.
- Volunteers present themselves in a way that suits the service, in both attire and manner.
- Volunteers deliver services, and handle enquiries or complaints in a calm, reasonable and friendly manner.
- Volunteers understand that there are different ways of doing things. Volunteers build relationships with stakeholders based on mutual understanding.
- Volunteers should be informed, be aware of and respect the norms and traditions of service recipients. Volunteers shall abide by the regulations and laws of the community where the services are being provided.
- Volunteers appreciate that people are entitled to hold different views. They do not have to accept or agree with these views, but shall maintain a courteous attitude at all times. When volunteers are asked to give a view, they present it in a calm, courteous and rational manner.
- Volunteers recognize that everyone is equal, i.e. volunteers disregard differences of service recipients or co-volunteers in terms of personal or social profile. When working in a team, volunteers embrace the opportunity to cooperate positively with others.

For formal volunteering:

- VIOs should adopt policies against discrimination.
- Volunteers abide by laws or regulations when delivering services and observe and respect the rules and policies of VIOs.



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Rationality

Volunteers will maintain a rational attitude, will be open-minded, objective and constructive in service or in giving feedback.

Volunteers will be sensitive to the needs and the expectations of other stakeholders.

- Volunteers are objective and avoid becoming too emotionally entangled in service recipients' conditions.
- Volunteers use common sense and reasoning, and take constructive approaches when carrying out the assignments.

For formal volunteering

- Volunteers share their experience and insights when planning assignments, and give feedback and constructive suggestions to VIOs.
- Volunteers inform VIOs if situations with service recipients are beyond their competence, or beyond the scopes of VIOs.
- Volunteers inform VIOs when they become aware of signs of emotional issues or transference and counter-transference which may hinder the delivery of service or damage the working relationships with service recipients.



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Integrity

Volunteers will be honest, impartial and trustworthy in their role.

Volunteers will act in the interest of service recipients, and in deference to the aims of the VIO for formal volunteering.

Volunteers will not abuse their role in pursuit of personal gain.

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- To the extent possible, volunteers shall inform service recipients upfront the recipients' rights, obligations, opportunities and risks associated with the services to be delivered in a manner appropriate to the service recipients' background and ability.
- Volunteers refrain from providing services if personal factors or value conflicts may lead to inappropriate or inadequate services or may adversely affect service recipients.
- Volunteers try to avoid getting into relationships and / or commitments that may be in conflict with the interests of service recipients. If such a conflict is likely or unavoidable, volunteers consider withdrawing from the situation and try to arrange for alternative service, and make such conflict known to service recipients; and for formal volunteering, the VIOs.
- Volunteers do not knowingly withhold information or give false information, especially if it may result in service recipients being deprived of their fair share of benefits or making a decision without knowing the likely consequence.
- Volunteers do not abuse time for personal or other interests during volunteering.
- Other than reasonable allowances, e.g. travel and meals, volunteers do not accept material offer in cash or in kind from service recipients; or for formal volunteering, VIOs.
- Volunteers do not provide material benefit to service recipients during services unless the benefits transferred are included in the context of the services.
- Volunteers do not take advantage of the service opportunity to seek information from service recipients that are useful or valuable for the volunteers' own pursuit, or for material benefits or monetary rewards.
- Volunteers do not knowingly withhold information concerning malpractice by other volunteers when called upon to give information at an inquiry on malpractice.
- Volunteers report facts that are known to them when called upon to give information on other volunteers who are subject to allegations.
- Volunteers do not have sexual relationships with service recipients.
- In case volunteers need to inspect or touch the private parts of service recipients when discharging their duties, the presence of a third party mutually agreed or arranged by the concerned VIOs (for formal volunteering) is a prerequisite.
- Volunteers do not exploit relationships with staff of VIOs for formal volunteering or service recipients for unethical gain or advancement.



【Hong Kong Volunteer Charter】

7

Self-Discipline

Volunteers will maintain a cordial and service-oriented relationship with service recipients, and for formal volunteering, the VIO.

Volunteers will respect confidentiality of the information to which they have access.

Volunteers may not, without consent, speak or act to represent service recipients, or for formal volunteering, the VIO.

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- When providing services, volunteers remain fully conscious and are free from the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Volunteers do not develop personal relationships with service recipients beyond the functional roles between volunteers and service recipients.
- Volunteers do not release information of service recipients through any channel, including social media platform, without prior consent of service recipients; and for formal volunteering, VIOs.
- Volunteers obtain consent of service recipients before sharing any of the recipients' information with third parties who are not engaged in the services.
- Volunteers do not retain any information in whatever form on ex-service recipients without their permission; and for formal volunteering, the permission of VIOs.
- Unless prohibited by law, volunteers should inform, and receive consent from service recipients; and for formal volunteering, VIOs, before they release any personal information about service recipients to a law enforcement body seeking such information. If deemed appropriate, volunteers should seek clarification from the law enforcement body or legal advice.
- In circumstances where there is an imminent serious threat to the safety of, or critical interest to, service recipients or of others, volunteers should take necessary steps to inform the appropriate parties; and for formal volunteering, VIOs, even without the prior consent of service recipients. Volunteers make reasonable assessments if service recipients should be alerted beyond the limits of confidentiality.



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Risk Management

Volunteers will assess if the service opportunity will suit their temperament or physique.

Volunteers will be alert to risks associated with the service or the working environment so as to take the necessary precaution or to undergo training for personal safety and safety of service recipients.

Volunteers will observe the risk management policy and practice of the VIO for formal volunteering, and comply with safety legislation.

Volunteers will explore the need for suitable insurance in service.

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- Volunteers recognize that they must take reasonable care of themselves. Volunteers will understand the nature and conditions of the service to ensure that they are mentally and physically fit to take on the assignment. During the service, volunteers ensure that their actions will not jeopardize the health or safety of service recipients or co-volunteers.

- Volunteers consider the need for insurance before service. Volunteers leave their contact details of their families or guardians in case of emergency.

For formal volunteering:

- Volunteers should be given adequate protection by VIOs. The protection should cover the volunteers' physical and mental safety.

- Prior to service, volunteers are provided with information on emergency procedures, means and channels to report risk or accident.

- VIOs shall inform volunteers whether they are appropriately insured. If there is no appropriate insurance, volunteers can decide whether to take on the service.

- Volunteers should be given training on precautionary measures and risk management that is appropriate for the services by VIOs.

- In case of emergency, after assuring their own safety, volunteers attend to the cases to provide support, even if such action goes beyond the original plan or function of VIOs. Volunteers contact VIOs as soon as practicable.



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1

Opportunity

Volunteers will serve in a role of their choice, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, creed, ability or social status.

Volunteers will serve with recognition, experiencing satisfaction, self-actualization and personal development.

Volunteers will participate in planning, executing and evaluating the task undertaken for formal volunteering.

For formal volunteering, VIOs which engage volunteers make arrangements including the following:

- To let volunteers understand their role in the service and of the organization, and the benefit they can bring to service recipients or to society.
- To offer orientation to volunteers on its organization, management and operation.
- To provide volunteers with suitable tasks which suit their abilities and talents taking into account the organization's goals and needs.
- To let volunteers determine the amount of time they devote to volunteer work while matching the service requirements.
- To offer volunteers the opportunities for personal development and advancement, based on their performance, personal preferences, skills and abilities subject to the organization's needs.
- To let staff and volunteers get to know one another to build a mutually respectful relationship.
- To offer training and guidance to staff on how to work effectively with volunteers.
- To incorporate volunteer service as an ingredient in the service delivery model.



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2

Respect

Volunteers will be the equal partner with other stakeholders rendering service in dignity and with individuality.

Volunteers will be free from exploitation, as a volunteer or as an individual.

Volunteers will not serve under extraneous pressure against their will; otherwise they will have the freedom to exit from their role.

- Volunteers are a part of the team for formal volunteering and have a role to play. Volunteers are respected as partners of VIOs.
- Though volunteering is not a paid job, volunteers have vision for fulfillment, recognition and advancement in their journey of volunteering.
- Volunteers serve freely with intention to give, but should not be expected to take on additional work or odd job that is beyond their will or skills without prior consultation.
- Volunteers should not be expected to fill in the role of paid staff even on a temporary basis. If it happens, paid staff may get the impression that the organization is taking advantage of volunteers, and the volunteers feel misplaced.
- Where there is difference in opinion among volunteers or with staff of VIOs, volunteers are given the opportunity to express their views and to resolve the difference with other volunteers, staff or other relevant parties.
- Volunteers do not criticize other volunteers, and for formal volunteering, staff of VIOs in front of service recipients.
- Volunteers do not make personal attack on the personality or integrity of other volunteers or staff of VIOs.



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Information

Volunteers will have access to adequate information related to their expected role including knowledge of service recipients, and for formal volunteering, the VIO.

Volunteers' personal data and service records should be treated in confidence, and volunteers will have the right to access their information for formal volunteering.

4

Knowledge / Skill and Support

For formal volunteering:

Volunteers will participate in knowledge and skill transfer activities and receive training and service briefing.

Volunteers will have access to appropriate tools and resources, and where applicable, organizational support, in discharging their role.

- Volunteers are given full information on the nature, objective / goal, process and the expected outcome of the service they are asked to perform.
- Sharing of information should be purposeful for service delivery.
- VIOs have policies and procedures on how confidential information is kept, and how it may be shared with volunteers.
- Volunteers treat information received, which may be directly from service recipients or from other stakeholders concerning service recipients, confidential. Volunteers will destroy such information once the service is concluded, or will return such to the provider as appropriate.
- If it is necessary for other stakeholders to have access to confidential information, the volunteers should inform the service recipient and notify the acquirers the importance of keeping the information confidential. For formal volunteering, VIOs and volunteers come to an agreed approach to respond to the stakeholders concerned.

For formal volunteering:

- Volunteers expect to receive support from VIOs in enhancing their knowledge of the organizations, the services and service recipients.
- VIOs consider offering mentoring or guidance to volunteers when necessary.
- VIOs are conscious of personal development of volunteers in volunteering and in their engagement with the organizations. They provide volunteers briefing, debriefing, training and development activities to build up their volunteering skills and knowledge required by VIOs.



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Communication

For formal volunteering:

Volunteers will have ample means to communicate with the VIO, to express their opinion, to give and to receive feedback related to their service.

Volunteers will have the opportunity to make comment or recommendation relating to their service or role, and to have their complaint, if any, dealt with promptly and fairly.

Volunteers will be aware of the coordinator of the service; they will have ready access to him / her on the service including provision of resources and feedback on their performance.

6

Safety

Volunteers will have the right to know the risk and liability related to their role, and to serve in a safe working environment, with suitable insurance coverage where appropriate.

For formal volunteering:

- Volunteers report any problem that may affect the service delivery or outcome.
- Volunteers report any policy, rule or regulation of the organizations which may undermine the efficiency or effectiveness of the services, or jeopardize the interests of service recipients.
- Volunteers bring the malpractice of other volunteers to the attention of the VIOs, and alert VIOs of any possible deviation from the Hong Kong Volunteer Charter or violation of any law or regulation. If malpractice by co-volunteers or VIOs persists and that the interests of service recipients are at risk, volunteers bring the matter to the attention of appropriate authorities.
- Volunteers advise service recipients the channel to lodge suggestions or complaints in accordance with the procedures of VIOs. If volunteers are aware that service recipients may be filing a complaint against them, volunteers would inform VIOs of such.
- VIOs have a mechanism to handle complaints by volunteers including a route of appeal.
- VIOs have policies and procedures on volunteers' safety.
- VIOs seek to ensure volunteers serve in a safe environment.
- Volunteers are aware and understand the nature and the risk associated with the service. Volunteers should be comfortable with the service environment before taking on the assignment.
- Volunteers are acquainted with locations of fire-fighting equipment and installation and the means of escape in the service environment.
- VIOs provide appropriate insurance cover to volunteers and should make it known.

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