1. GOOD EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE IN OUR SECTOR

Our sector has unique ways of working. Our work is multi-layered and involves a wide range of relationships. We also wear multiple 'hats' in the course of our work. These can include being a volunteer, trustee, paid staff member, funder or service user, sometimes all at once! This all adds to the richness and complexity of the sector, but can complicate things, especially when it comes to being an employer.

As well as complying with standard good employment practice, being a good employer in our sector means that employers need to nurture and manage all of these relationships. This means:

- Developing employment policies and practices that model and support the organisation's values and kaupapa
- Ensuring good communication processes between all parts of the organisation
- Supporting paid and volunteer staff, and ensuring they feel valued
- Being aware of and managing the tensions that can arise between governance members and paid staff, and being clear about their respective roles and responsibilities.

Above all, it means keeping an organisation true to its vision, mission and values, and ensuring that everyone involved feels they are effectively contributing their energy and skills toward this end.

Here are some general guides to best practice which help make relationships smoother and prevent problems arising.

- Make sure employees are well informed about their employment rights and responsibilities
- Keep good staff records, noting start dates, qualifications, performance review outcomes, and training courses undertaken
- Record agreements (and changes to agreements) in writing. This helps to prevent misunderstandings, and to resolve problems if they arise later
- Make it clear within the agreement that the terms of employment being offered are only those recorded in the written agreement. Then avoid giving assurances that are inconsistent with the written agreement, or that are not recorded in it
- Consult with the people potentially affected before making a significant change. Getting everyone's ideas and perspectives will often lead to better decisions. People respond better to change when they have some warning and feel they have been listened to
- Act early when problems start to appear. Raising concerns when they first arise can help stop them becoming bigger and harder to resolve. An effective performance management system is a good way of ensuring this
- Develop and maintain up-to-date employment policies and procedures - including mechanisms for resolving problems, grievances and complaints
- Ensure grievance and complaints polices are easily accessible and well-displayed, so that everyone knows what the procedures are.

EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

The development of policies which support good employment practice provides a sound basis for building strong employment relationships.

The governing board or committee is responsible for developing these policies and should do so in consultation with staff.

Good practice policies should include statements that the organisation:

- Supports human rights legislation
- Is an equal opportunities employer
- Meets and honours its Treaty of Waitangi obligations
- Follows defined personnel practices (eg code of conduct, performance appraisal, supervision, disciplinary policy, conflict resolution)
- Has rules about confidentiality and protocols for dealing with the media
- Requires screening before employing staff who work with vulnerable clients
- Has workplace health and safety provisions
- Encourages staff development

- Makes provisions for family-friendly and flexible work.

All employment-related policies can be encapsulated in a staff handbook, and/or as part of an organisational policy manual. If a handbook is used, individual staff employment agreements can be developed in conjunction with the handbook. The handbook is then reviewed on a regular basis as part of the organisation's routine cycle of policy review.

GOOD COMMUNICATION

Clear, transparent and regular communication processes need to occur between and across all levels of an organisation - they help everyone involved to feel that their contribution is valued. Good communication processes can also help avoid the buildup of conflict, and may often mean a situation can be diffused well before a problem develops.

Communication needs to be a genuine two-way process - staff who feel they are able to have input into the operation and development of the organisation will be more productive, will be more likely to deal better with stress, and will respond positively to change.

ENSURING STAFF FEEL VALUED

Staff - paid or voluntary - will feel valued when they know:

- What is expected of them in their job
- What salaries and/or conditions of service apply to them
- What career path, training and personal development is available
- What methods of support and supervision will be provided
- That the organisation will acknowledge and utilise their experience and expertise in developing its services.

At the same time, an organisation needs to have systems in place that allows it to gauge whether:

- Staff - paid or voluntary - are working effectively
- Service users are receiving a high quality service
- Financial investments in staff are cost effective.

All of these requirements will be supported by the adoption and implementation of sound employment policies and practices.

GOVERNANCE - MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Tensions between governance members and paid staff in sector organisations require delicate balancing. The boundaries between governance and management are often blurry, especially for small organisations where board members often play some management or hands-on role. When these tensions are not managed well they often lead to more serious problems which can affect people's employment.

Having clear policies and procedures in place will help give both staff and board members some clarity from the start.

- Board members have a fiduciary duty, meaning they are both individually and collectively liable for ensuring the organisation remains financially viable. This responsibility extends to employment, which is usually the major financial cost involved in running the organisation
- Ensure all board members have adequate training in governance and understand their employer obligations
- Clarify the respective responsibilities of staff and board members by developing position descriptions for each member of the board. These can then sit alongside the staff job descriptions, providing reassurance about each other's roles
- Many organisations are too small to have their own HR department. They could instead consider establishing an employment subcommittee of the board which can oversee recruitment, employment and performance appraisals and deal with any problems. Such a group should include the chair and the lead staff member/s
- Make sure the lines of accountability are clear and that employees know who to report to; set this out in the employment agreement
- If you are a board member, think before you act - is it appropriate for you to get involved? Are you clear about the boundaries between governance and management in your organisation and your own role? Are there any conflicts of interest?

SELECTING AND SUPPORTING LEAD STAFF MEMBERS

The responsibility for selecting lead staff members - Manager, Coordinator, or Chief Executive - potentially has one of the greatest impacts on the organisation's development and effectiveness and

as such is one of the major responsibilities of the governance team.

As with all staff recruitment, a carefully considered selection process is essential. However in order for the staff member to perform effectively, the board must also ensure this person is going to enter a positive working environment. Prior to recruitment, therefore, the board should:

- Review the organisation's vision, mission and values

- Conduct an inventory of the organisation's strengths and needs

- Establish specific long term priorities for the next period

- Establish clear objectives and expectations for at least the first year of the new lead staff member's service

- Clarify the skills, experience and style it is seeking in its new recruit

- Ensure there is an adequate remuneration package on offer

- Clarify its own functions as distinct from the lead staff member, including the lead staff member's responsibility to supervise staff without board interference (and in many cases, select them as well)

- Develop a comprehensive job description that sits clearly alongside and is clearly differentiated from, the Chair of the organisation.

Once selected, the board needs to take responsibility to ensure that the lead staff member's performance is regularly and routinely reviewed, and that they feel adequately supported to undertake their role.

Having one lead staff member is of course only one way of structuring an organisation. There are other management models in our sector which involve collective ways of operating or joint/shared management. Each of these needs a tailored approach to ensure that governance members and staff work well together.

MANAGING VOLUNTEERS

The skilful management of volunteer/paid staff relations is a key role for many managers and employers in our sector. Many groups begin life as completely voluntary organisations, later going on to employ staff as they expand and become more formalised.

However, volunteers - including governance members - often continue to play a very significant role and make a major contribution to the work and/or direction of the organisation.

While they are not engaged in a formal employment relationship, in many ways volunteers need to be treated in much the same way as paid employees. For instance, they need clear role descriptions and good induction, they need to know what is expected of them and that their contribution will be valued, and they need to receive appropriate support, training and feedback *(see box overleaf)*.

Clear boundaries between paid work and voluntary work, good communication processes and regular chances for everyone to meet, discuss issues and have fun together will all help to foster strong relationships between paid staff and volunteers.

WHAT IS A GOOD EMPLOYER?

- One that does not leave an employee without direction

- Supports but does not dominate

- Empowers, enables and encourages

- Has expectations after clear guidelines

- Provides a good job description

- Provides training opportunities

- Provides comfortable working conditions

- Provides necessary tools to produce expected results

- Provides resources for independent supervision

- Does not expect staff to raise their own salary

- Says thank you - it costs nothing

- Allows the employee to be a valued part of the organisation, not someone who presents a faceless report

- Provides regular constructive feedback

- Provides opportunities for communication (other than in writing) so difficulties and differences can be resolved before they become conflicts

- Provides regular performance appraisals and uses these as a tool to help employees, strengthen and develop the agency and move forward

- Does not focus on personalities but rather on performance

- Has policies and procedures in place to protect both employees and the organisation

- Does not use employees as a scapegoat for their own power trip.

RECOGNISING VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS

Recognise and reward volunteer contributions by:

Formal

- Dealing with the volunteer professionally
- Identifying and publicly acknowledging the volunteer's specific achievements
- Providing the volunteer with a reference when she or he leaves

Informal

- Providing allowances and reimbursing expenses
- Providing equal recognition as a paid staff member at the end of their service
- Paying them when they take on work usually done by paid employees
- Providing free or low-cost membership of the organisation, or a free voucher to a course programme
- Getting to know the volunteer - understanding what they are interested in - building a relationship
- Including them in events and celebrations
- Having a caring attitude, expressing an interest and taking time to visit the volunteer on the job
- Rewarding them in simple, low cost ways - combine a team meeting with a meal prepared in advance, acknowledge anniversaries.

Source: Community Resource Kit, *Managing Volunteers* www.community.net.nz

© Crown Copyright Department of Internal Affairs

Information

- www.community.net.nz - Community Net 'How to' Guide on Volunteering
- www.nscss.org.nz - North Shore Community and Social Services *Volunteer Management.* NSCSS also has a range of other employment resources for community organisations available for purchase
- www.nzfvwo.org.nz - NZ Federation of Voluntary Welfare Organisations *Managing Volunteers*
- www.tpk.govt.nz - Te Puni Kokiri has a range of useful resources on effective governance
- www.unitec.ac.nz - Unitec offers an excellent range of training in not-for-profit management, including courses in governance and small team leadership
- www.volcan.org.nz - Volunteering Canterbury website
- www.volunteeringnz.org.nz - Volunteering New Zealand website.

Resources

- Resource 1: Sample Employee Handbook
- Resource 4: Sample Governance Position Descriptions - includes sample position descriptions for board members and a checklist for developing volunteer roles.