

# ALASKA



## FOOD COALITION

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**“Volunteers are the only human beings on the face of the earth who reflect this nation's compassion, unselfish caring, patience, and just plain love for one another.”**

- Erma Bombeck, American Humorist and Author

## **Volunteers, Boundaries and Confidentiality**

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### **Volunteers**

Your program or agency most likely relies heavily on volunteer support, and you yourself may be a volunteer. Most agencies or businesses invest in training and support for staff. It is equally important for you to invest in clarifying the roles and expectations for your volunteers, particularly as they relate to interaction with clients and personal client information. Most businesses require that employees adhere to policy concerning confidentiality. It is essential that you include policy about confidentiality in your volunteer job description.

Volunteers must be made aware of the confidential nature of client information, which should always be observed for the protection of the client, the volunteer and the agency. One should never share clients name or personal matters to anyone except agency staff. In order to foster healthy and appropriate communication with volunteers, we encourage you to create opportunities for your volunteers to talk to appropriate staff in a safe and confidential space. Give your staff and volunteers an opportunity to 'debrief' and communicate about confidential issues and concerns they may encounter.

### **Boundaries**

What are they and why do we need professional boundaries in volunteer roles?

- Boundaries set the parameters of what is and is not acceptable behavior by staff and volunteers in the workplace
- Boundaries help to protect and inform both staff, volunteers and service users by clarifying what types of behavior will or will not be tolerated
- Boundaries give volunteers confidence as they know how to react to different situations
- Clear boundaries help to develop trusting relationships with clients who will know what to expect from staff and volunteers
- Boundaries help to develop professionalism by encouraging high standards of work and consistency between staff and volunteers

*The Volunteer Strategic Partnership*

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality relates specifically to the protection of private information acquired through work by staff or volunteers. It involves protecting and actively promoting the dignity and privacy of the people involved. Information regarding clients should only be discussed with agency staff when there is concern. If in doubt – ask your agency director. Directors, instruct your volunteers to contact you directly.

*The Volunteer Strategic Partnership*

Client confidentiality should not be a barrier to the use of volunteers in direct service programs. Volunteers who are recruited by agencies should be trained and supervised, they should be expected to maintain the same standards of confidentiality as staff, and be subject to the same prohibitions and standards concerning disclosure of information.  
*Energize, Inc. Volunteer Management Library*

Breach of Confidentiality – this happens when you reveal information that you have not been given permission to disclose, revealing information you know people would prefer to be kept confidential. Volunteers have a duty to not disclose confidential information unless:

- The disclosure is about something illegal
- Interest of the client requires disclosure (child or elder abuse, domestic violence)
- The disclosure is made with the consent of those involved

*Government of South Australia, Office of Volunteers*

## **RESOURCES**

The Volunteer Strategic Partnership

<http://www.bvolunteering.org/Good%20Practice%20Guidelines/guidelines.html>

Energize, Inc. - Leaders of Volunteers

<http://www.energizeinc.com/>

Durham Meals-on-Wheels Program

[www.mowdurham.org/volunteer-central.htm#3](http://www.mowdurham.org/volunteer-central.htm#3)

Government of South Australia, Office of Volunteers

[www.ofv.sa.gov.au/pdfs/mods\\_%20BeAnEffectiveVolunteer.pps](http://www.ofv.sa.gov.au/pdfs/mods_%20BeAnEffectiveVolunteer.pps)

*Sample Volunteer Confidentiality Agreements*

[http://www.plainfieldfoodpantry.org/media/AA/AH/plainfieldfoodpantry-org/downloads/41231/PIFP\\_Volunteer\\_ConfidentialityAgreement.pdf](http://www.plainfieldfoodpantry.org/media/AA/AH/plainfieldfoodpantry-org/downloads/41231/PIFP_Volunteer_ConfidentialityAgreement.pdf)

[www.caastlc.org/vol\\_agree.pdf](http://www.caastlc.org/vol_agree.pdf)

[http://www.threeriverscap.org/pdf/Volunteer\\_Application\\_Confidentiality\\_Agreement.pdf](http://www.threeriverscap.org/pdf/Volunteer_Application_Confidentiality_Agreement.pdf)

*The Alaska Food Coalition is here to help. Copies of Alaska Food Coalition White Papers are available online: <http://www.alaskafood.org/whitepapers.shtml> For additional information, contact Vanessa Salinas, Alaska Food Coalition Manager:*

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**NEXT MONTH: Volunteer Appreciation**