

Welcome

Volunteer Centre
Hertsmere



**... to the world of
volunteering**

This pack is designed as an introduction to volunteering and gives a few ideas of how to get started. You may have been involved in voluntary work before so will have first hand experience of what to expect. Every organisation is different. Some work on a casual basis while others are more formal. The issues discussed in this pack are merely guidelines and should not be used as a definitive model of a voluntary organisation. However we hope that you find the information useful and that your volunteering is an enjoyable experience.

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Voluntary opportunities

Volunteering comes in many shapes and forms and the range of opportunities is vast. Whether you want to work indoors or out, alone or with others, caring for people or caring for the environment, office work or DIY, work three hours a month or two days a week there is something to suit you. Most opportunities do not need you to be experienced or trained before you volunteer with them as they often train you themselves. All you need to do is think about you want to do!

Visiting an organisation

Before becoming a volunteer for any organisation you should have the opportunity to visit and talk with them.

There are questions that you as a potential volunteer should think about during this first visit.

- Why you want to volunteer?
- What is it you hope to gain from volunteering?
- How much time do you want to give?
- How much commitment do you want to make?
- What skills would you like to gain?
- Do you want to work alone or with others?
- How easy and safe is it to travel to and from the organisation?

You want to make sure that the organisation is what you are looking for before you make a commitment.



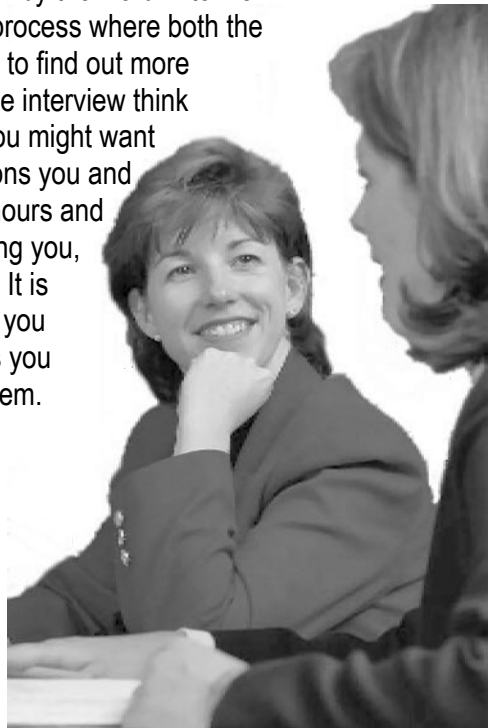
Application and interview

Different organisations use different processes for recruiting and selecting volunteers. Some organisations will invite you to visit for a chat, others may interview you or offer a training course before deciding whether you are suitable or not.

Don't be put off if an organisation does not accept your offer of help. Due to the nature of the work some organisations need to ensure that they recruit volunteers with specific skills, despite still relying on the kindness of people giving up their time for free. This does not mean that you are not capable or wanted. What it does mean is that you need to re-think the types of volunteering opportunities which you can do with the help of the Volunteer Centre.

Interviews tend to be informal, again depending on the nature of the organisation. Don't be scared or put off by the word 'interview'.

An interview is very much a two way process where both the interviewer and interviewee have time to find out more about each other. Before going into the interview think about what you would like to know. You might want to think about expense, the expectations you and the organisation have of each other, hours and days of work, who would be supervising you, what training you would be entitled to. It is a good time to state any expectations you have of the organisation and what it is you hope to gain from volunteering with them.



Insurance

You should always be covered by your host organisation's insurance. Do check that you are covered for accidents and loss or damage to property.

If you use your car to carry out duties for the organisation you must contact your own insurance company to include this on your policy. Many insurance companies add this on at no extra charge to you but they do like to know. However if there is an additional charge, speak to your organisation about reimbursement.

Policies

Although often we think of policies to be superfluous and pieces of paper which remain locked away, they are important and active statements. Do take time to become familiar with the organisation's policies which will probably include: health and safety, equal opportunities, confidentiality and a complaints/grievance procedure.

As a volunteer you will be expected to adhere to such policies they are there to safeguard you as well as members of the public.

Expenses

As a volunteer you should not be out-of-pocket from your work. However some organisations do not have vast budgets and may be limited to what they can reimburse.

Many organisations pay for travel both to and from the organisation and any travel during the course of the voluntary work.

- Mileage rates are dependent on the size of your vehicle's engine.
- Bus fares are usually reimbursed to the exact amount shown on the receipt and in return for the receipt.
- You may also be eligible for meal and child care expenses.
- If you do not need or want to receive expenses do still claim the money and then return as a donation.

Confidentiality

Many organisations hold a confidentiality policy due to the nature of the work (particularly where there are clients involved). Confidentiality must be respected and adhered to. Be aware of who you talk to about certain matters and where. Talk to your supervisor/co-ordinator about any cases that are worrying in a private place.



Problems

Hopefully you will not encounter any problems with your host organisation. Occasionally issues do arise and you need to be aware of how to deal with them. Wherever possible discuss anything that makes you uncomfortable or unhappy with your supervisor/volunteer co-ordinator. If you are unable to or your problem is not resolved in this way, it may be appropriate to approach somebody in a higher position within the organisation.

You should use the grievance procedure for any unresolved or serious matter. You can at any time speak to a member of staff at the Volunteer Centre who will aim to support you as appropriate.

CRB checks

All organisations need to be able to trust those who work with them. To protect vulnerable children and adults you may be asked to undergo a Criminal Record Bureau check. Please ask at the Volunteer Centre for details of how this works.



Volunteering agreement

You may find that the organisation you have chosen wants to make a volunteer agreement with you.

This may take the form of a letter reiterating the things you agreed at the interview i.e. times and days you will be attending, expenses, tasks etc.

It may be a form that you and the organisation sign. This gives you a basis from which to work and refer to at a later date.

Health, safety and security

- You are responsible for cooperating with existing safety arrangements and generally avoiding doing anything which endangers your own safety or that of others.
- Make sure you know the location of the first aid box, the fire blanket, the fire extinguisher, the fire exits.
- Keep and record all training completed and training materials.



In case of fire



Remember that in every situation human life is more important than premises or equipment – leave with all participants to an agreed meeting point outside the building, check that all participants have left and return only once the Fire Rescue Services have said that it is okay to do so. The meeting point should be clearly indicated within the organisation premises.

The use, handling, storage and transport of articles and substances

Always refer to the organisations policies and procedures.

- Correct lifting techniques: as a general guide, keep your back straight and bend from the knees. If in doubt get help. Never lift people unless you have completed a manual handling training course.
- Fall injury reduction: ensure that walking spaces are free of wires or other objects that may cause a fall.
- Correct keyboard and PC operation: maintain an appropriate distance from the screen. Take regular breaks from PC work at least once an hour. Ensure chairs provide adequate height and back support.
- Reduction of electrocution risk: Use of appropriate fuses. Turn off electrical appliances when vacating the building.
- Second hand equipment and furniture should be checked for any faults or wear that could raise injury. Check furniture has non-inflammable foam.
- Risk of infection (particularly tetanus, and hepatitis B): cuts/broken skin should be covered by a waterproof plaster, any materials coming into contact with bodily fluids should be removed and washed thoroughly before being re-used. The first aid box should be equipped with protective gloves.
- Medicines: unless insurance has been secured, employees and volunteers should not administer medicines to another individual.



Security, meeting someone new

- Tell someone or record where you are going and what time you expect to be back.
- Meet at the organisation premises or in a public place.
- Be wary of over familiarity: e.g. continuing the meeting over drinks or a meal, talking about personal subjects not on the agenda, accepting a lift home.



How placement organisations can support health, safety and security

Health and Safety practice cannot just be assumed to be operating. Organisations should have:

- **A statement of intent** regarding health, safety and security
- **Policies and procedures** to ensure that health, safety and security are supported in each area of the organisation.
- **A monitoring system** for recording accidents, lapses of security, health and safety issues.
- **A programme of planning, implementation and evaluation**

Working rights for volunteers

Starting work

There should be no unexpected delay between offering your services and starting work. If you are not suitable you should be told why – and be offered alternatives.

Induction

Full information on the organisation and where volunteers fit in should be given at the start.

Confidentiality

Only relevant information should be requested from you during selection. You should be told why it is needed. Anything in writing should be kept confidential.

Equal treatment

There should be no discrimination on race, sex, sexuality, age, class, disability or history of illness. You must in turn not discriminate against others.

Work details

You should be given a clear description, in writing, of your volunteering job and how your work will be evaluated. You should not be given only tedious and repetitive tasks. Hours of work should be agreed and put into writing.

Supervision

You should be told to whom you are responsible. You should be able to approach them to talk through any worries or problems.

Health and safety

You should not work in unsafe or unhealthy conditions. There should be a health and safety policy, which meets legal requirements.

Insurance

The organisation should insure you adequately.

Genuine voluntary work

You should not be asked to do work which someone has previously been paid to do, unless agreed with the union concerned.

Clothing and equipment

Any special clothing or equipment needed for your work should be provided.

Time off

You should get time off (e.g. for holidays or an emergency)

Trade union membership

You should have the right to join a trade union.

Training

You should be given the chance to train, to develop the skills you need.

If you have particular skills, make sure the organisation knows.

Consultation and involvement

You should be consulted over changes in your work, and involved in the general life of the organisation.

Expenses

Expenses incurred for your work (e.g. travel or phone calls) should be reimbursed (Note: This should not affect state benefits if you can prove the expenses are genuine). Remember some organisations can't afford to pay volunteers expenses. Check this before you start.

Review and development

Your work should be reviewed after a few weeks, then again at regular intervals, making changes if necessary. The review should involve you and those with whom you work closely. Your work should develop as your skills grow.

References

You should be able to receive a reference on the basis of your voluntary work.

Satisfaction

If your volunteering isn't satisfying, ask yourself why. A small change in your work could make all the difference.

Using volunteering as a tool

For many volunteering is used as a means to an end. People make job contacts, learn new skills, gain employment and even qualifications, all from voluntary work.

You can adapt your voluntary role to suit your needs and also adapt the skills you have already gained to suit applications for certain jobs.

- Keep a record of what you do so that you can build a portfolio for future employers.
- Try keeping a diary of each day that you volunteer.
- Note how many hours you have done.
- What you have done.
- What you think you have learnt or new skills you have gained.
- Pay particular attention to any projects you have initiated as an individual or group.
- Include samples of work or photos if appropriate.
- Keep the information to develop an informative and substantial portfolio.
- Don't be modest about volunteering that you have done. It is as valuable as paid work and in some cases more so.
- Involve your supervisor where possible. Either ask if they have time to comment on your work or sign to agree with the diary you have written.
- Present the information well and use when meeting potential employers or universities.

Some do's and don'ts for volunteers

DO think about why you want to volunteer

DON'T start volunteering until you know exactly what is expected of you

DO ask about the organisation and where you fit in

DON'T over commit yourself. Reliability is vital

DO make sure you know to whom you can go to for help and advice

DON'T just leave the project because you are fed up, having problems, or feel you are being taken advantage of. Discuss how you feel with the person in charge of the organisation/project first

DO accept volunteer expenses. You can give them back as a donation to the organisation if you don't need reimbursing

DON'T ever accept money from someone you have helped in the course of volunteering. Explain to them that they can make a donation to the organisation if they wish to

DO keep to any arrangement you have made. If you cannot keep an appointment, or you are going to be late, let the volunteer organiser, or person you are visiting know in plenty of time

DON'T betray confidences entrusted to you as a volunteer

DO keep in touch with your local Volunteer Centre !

DON'T carry out any job if it is against your wishes or principles discuss the situation with the person in charge

DO enjoy yourself !

