



Volunteering

A beginner's guide

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WHAT TO EXPECT FROM VOLUNTEERING

What is volunteering? FAQ

Volunteering is an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment, individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives.

Volunteering covers a huge range of activities but it essentially means doing something that you have freely chosen to do to help others, not because of any financial reward but because you want to make a difference.

How much time do I need?

This is really up to you. You can find volunteering that only takes an hour a month, though the less time you have the harder it can be to find something that's right for you. You can volunteer at any time of the week, day or night. While much volunteering takes place in office hours, you can volunteer at evenings and weekends too, again depending on what you want to do. Typical flexible volunteering includes befriending, campaigning, fundraising and events.

What about expenses?

We ask that voluntary organisations cover your full expenses, such as bus fares, in a simple way. Unfortunately not all organisations do, they may not have enough funds or simply not realise how important it is. Before starting, ask about your expenses. Should you need any advice, we can help.

What about qualifications?

Usually you don't need any specific qualifications, though you may need certain skills depending on the role, for example administration. Some organisations offer accredited qualifications as you volunteer, particularly in areas such as mentoring or youth work. You may well learn a lot and gain valuable experience, skills and a reference as a volunteer.

I'm working fulltime. Will I still be able to volunteer?

Yes, there are many opportunities to volunteer that do not require you to be available Monday to Friday during the day. Don't be put off volunteering because you work fulltime! Many organisations would love to find volunteers that are able to volunteer evenings, nights and/or weekends.

Some examples of out of office hours volunteering include: campaigning, the Samaritans or other helplines, working with homeless people, befriending, environmental work and some sports activities.

Will I get training?

Training can vary a lot. Some organisations offer substantial training and support, but others don't and expect you to learn on the job or contribute existing skills.

It also depends on the type of work you will be doing. So if you're spending one day clearing overgrowth from paths, expect about 15 minutes at the start being told what to do, how to use the tools and what health and safety precautions to take. But if you volunteer to give welfare benefits advice you should get much more training. You might get 10 two hour training sessions spread over several weeks before you see a client, plus ongoing training to keep you up to date.

Can I still claim benefits?

Yes you can. The regulations are clear that you can volunteer whilst on benefits though we recommend that you tell your benefits office. If you have any specific questions please get in touch as we can provide up to date information for you.

Can I leave if I don't like it?

Yes, of course. You are under no real obligation to keep volunteering for an organisation that you are unhappy in. Having said that however, it is always worth talking to somebody about it first. This could be your organisation's volunteer coordinator (if there is one), your supervisor or someone in the organisation who is responsible for you or someone with whom you have got on well. You can then discuss with them why you feel unhappy and what you feel would improve your time as a volunteer in the organisation. It is also something you may want to talk about with other volunteers in the organisation. You could either do this informally, or if your organisation has a Volunteers Council or a regular meeting that all volunteers attend, you could bring up your problem there.

If you feel that something is seriously wrong or someone is treating you badly it is also worth checking whether your organisation has a complaints procedure.

What will be expected of me?

- To respect the privacy, property and confidentiality of others
- To in no way discriminate on the grounds of age, gender, race or religion
- To follow Health and Safety procedures as appropriate and to attend regular training and refresher sessions as required
- To maintain regular contact with the organisation and immediately report any problems to the designated person
- To aim to fulfil the commitment you have made, as fully as possible, and if you are unable to attend to inform your designated contact

Please contact your local Volunteer Centre for more information or to answer any further questions.

YOUR VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW

Most organisations will probably not formally interview you before they place you, but they will probably want to have an informal chat. However, if the role has some responsibility, for instance, for money, or if you will be working with people or with dangerous equipment, the interview may be more formal.

In either case this gives you, and the organisation, a chance to assess each other and an opportunity to ask questions. The sort of questions the organisation will probably want to ask you will vary from organisation to organisation and depend on the type of voluntary work you are interested in.

However, a typical interviewer (formal or informal) may ask any of the following:

- why you are interested in volunteering
- what sort of voluntary work you are interested in
- what your particular skills are
- what new skills you would like to learn through your volunteer work
- how much time you have to offer

You can ask them anything that you feel unsure about. You may want to check some or all of the following:

- reimbursement of expenses
- training/qualification opportunities
- what variety will there be in the work?
- support/supervision (someone to talk to about how you are getting on)
- how volunteering may affect your benefits, if you are claiming

An informal chat or interview can also give you an opportunity to look at where you will be volunteering and meet some of the other staff and volunteers. Remember at this stage you have made no commitment; if you don't think the role is for you, explain this to the organisation and go back to your volunteer co-ordinator.

In addition to some form of meeting you may also be required to complete an application or registration form and in some cases provide references. If you need any help with this please ask [your local Volunteer Centre](#).

WHEN STARTING YOUR PLACEMENT

The organisation should give you a clear picture of your duties and responsibilities.

A job description should be available specifying to whom you will be responsible, who will provide you with support and whom you should turn to for advice if a problem arises.

- ask if training is provided.
- ask if out of pocket expenses are payable.
- ask about insurance cover.
- ask about fire exits and procedures.

Volunteer Centres offer advice and support if needed, please do not hesitate to contact one.

Sometimes two character references will be required from volunteers. Make sure you inform your referees that you have given their contact details. You could take the opportunity to explain what you will be doing and get their advice on whether it is a suitable placement for you.

A CRB (police check) will be undertaken if you wish to work with children or vulnerable people. If you have any worries about this, please tell your Volunteer Centre in confidence and they will be able to give you guidance. You can still do lots of volunteer work even if you have a criminal record.

NEED A VOLUNTEER?



Your local Volunteer Centre will recruit, place and support local people who want to volunteer.

It will respond to organisations that need volunteer help.

Are you a local charity, community organisation or non-profit making group?

Or perhaps you are a statutory body such as a school or a hospital?

Are there times when you could use voluntary help of some kind?

Do you need more manpower to make a special project happen?

A volunteer could be the answer to your problems

Volunteers add diversity and fresh ideas to organisations. They are flexible and enthusiastic. Who doesn't need an extra pair of hands?

You can use your local [Volunteer Centre](#) to attract volunteers and promote your volunteer opportunities.

Typically, a [Volunteer Centre](#) can:

- contact volunteers who are registered with them
- use the national volunteering database
- use the Internet, notice boards and regular marketing publications
- use their knowledge of the local community and the local press
- help you with a volunteer agreement
- find the answer to questions you may have

You might like to register your new volunteering opportunity on the Do-It website:

www.do-it.org