

Occasional Volunteering – Helping out from Time to Time

INFORMATION SHEET

This information sheet includes guidance for groups or organisations which involve volunteers from time to time. This form of volunteering is also known as ‘occasional volunteering’ and is defined as situations where a person volunteers less often than once a month or on a ‘one-off’ basis (Institute for Volunteering Research).

Occasional volunteering roles tend to be activities which groups / organisations do not require a regular commitment for or activities which are run at particular times during the year for a short period of time. For example, flag days for fundraising, helping out at planned events such as summer fetes or activities which are completely unplanned but which occur as a reaction to a need / event i.e. campaign or lobbying work.

Occasional volunteering can also include opportunities that are arranged through employers, also called Employer Supported Volunteering. These often take the form of a group of employees, taking a day or half day of work time to help out voluntary / community groups i.e. beach clean or painting a local community centre.

GOOD PRACTICE POINTS

No matter what form the ‘one off’ or ‘occasional’ helping out takes, there are a number of good practice points that are useful to consider. Applying good practice helps to ensure that the organisation / group achieves their aim i.e. *have a successful flag day which raises funds, and at the same time offers a safe and suitable role for the volunteer i.e. helping a group to raise funds.*

QUICK-LINKS TO SPECIFIC SECTIONS

1. [Planning for volunteer involvement](#)
2. [Providing volunteers with adequate information](#)
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1. PLANNING FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

Before you involve volunteers for a 'one off' or 'occasional' role, it is important to think about the things that should be organised to ensure that it happens successfully and safely.

Choosing a suitable role for occasional / one off volunteering

- It is important to consider what are reasonable tasks or roles to ask people to do on a 'one off' or 'occasional' basis. Roles which require a significant amount of training may not be suitable for this type of volunteering. The most suitable occasional volunteering roles are those which can be completed in a short period of time. This also means that volunteers can see a visible outcome from their work. This can be very motivational and is more likely to lead to people coming back to help out in the future.
- It is important that volunteers are not asked to carry out a role which would usually be carried out by a paid member of staff. This situation could be construed by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) as job substitution and could have ramifications for volunteers, if they are claiming benefits. Further information on Volunteering and Social Security Benefits Leaflet is available from <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/fs/doc/publications/volunteering-and-social-securitybenefits.pdf>

Choosing recruitment method(s)

- People who are interested in helping out on an 'occasional' or 'one off' basis often find out about these opportunities in a wide range of ways, including, their local paper or radio station, leaflets /posters, employers, as well as from family and friends. To optimise your success with getting willing volunteers, it is important to consider what **recruitment method** would be most successful. The **Volunteer Now website** gives organisations the opportunity to **advertise occasional / one off roles**, as well as more regular volunteering opportunities. There is no charge for this service. To register to do this go to <http://opportunities.volunteernow.co.uk/Login.aspx>.

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Providing a clear recruitment message

- Irrespective of what recruitment method is used, it is important that the message is clear and provides all the information that is needed.
- Recruitment messages should include information on what people will be expected to do, what the benefits are for themselves as well as the cause, when the volunteering will be happening, where the volunteering is being held, who the main contact for further information is and what the closing date for showing interest is. If there are expenses that people may incur as a consequence of volunteering, state what they will be at the outset and whether your group will be reimbursing them or not i.e. fuel costs associated with travelling to the venue.

Following up with people promptly

- It is important to try and respond to people as **promptly** as possible after they show interest in helping out. A slow response by your group or organisation may turn people off and **discourage** them from considering volunteering with you in the future. If the person tells others about their bad experience it could also damage your organisation or group reputation.
- Some 'one off' volunteering opportunities may be as **simple** as asking people to turn up at a particular place to begin volunteering. Just make sure you have provided all the necessary information in your publicity material. If possible, it is useful to provide a contact number, if people want to speak to someone before deciding. Environmental projects tend to find this approach works for things like beach cleans or clearing scrub areas.
- You can get more help in how to develop recruitment material by going to the publication section of Volunteer Now website
<http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/fs/doc/publications/plan-for-recruiting-volunteers-information-sheet-nl.pdf>

Working out how many volunteers are needed

- It is good to have an idea of the number of volunteers you will need. Having too many volunteers can turn into unnecessary extra work for the organisers and can be disappointing for people who have no clear task to do. It is also important to know the minimum number of volunteers that the project can work with. If you don't have enough volunteers recruited for the project to take place, then have a re-think about what you can do instead.

2. PROVIDING VOLUNTEERS WITH ADEQUATE INFORMATION

- No matter how long someone is being asked to volunteer for, it is of the utmost importance that they have all the **information and materials** that they require to carry out the role. With volunteering roles which are only happening for a few hours or half a day, it is important that everything runs efficiently, so **planning before hand** is key!. Make sure that all the necessary information and materials are ready for volunteers to start carrying out the role as soon as they arrive.
- Have you considered the need for an **informal chat** with the volunteers to determine whether they are suitable for the role you are offering? This isn't always necessary, but be sure that you are confident that the roles can be carried out fully and safely, based on the information you have.
- If a role has a number of duties it is useful to prepare a **role description** which outlines what exactly is expected of them. However, people helping out at a beach clean **may not require** a role description; a briefing session at the site may suffice. To **learn more preparing a role descriptions** download the 'Recruitment plan for Volunteers' at <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/fs/doc/publications/plan-for-recruiting-volunteers-information-sheet-nl.pdf>.
- For certain volunteer roles, it may be useful to meet with the volunteer /group of volunteers for a **briefing before the activity** begins. This is most useful, if there is quite a lot of **information** that you would like the volunteers to be aware of before

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they begin or if you think that some pre-training is required. For example, if a volunteer is asked to manage a sub team of volunteers, they may require some basic management skills and **health and safety guidelines**, if they haven't done it before.

- For other tasks, a **briefing meeting, just before** the volunteering occurs is sufficient. For example, on a fundraising flag day, information *re: start- end times, key contact, health and safety guidelines*, can be given to volunteers when they are collecting the collection tins rather than asking them to meet beforehand. When deciding on how much information or training to give volunteers, consider the role and the past experience that the volunteer has.

Volunteers need to be provided with guidelines on what they will be expected to do, when the volunteering will be happening, where the volunteering is being held, and who the main contact for information and support is. In some circumstances you may wish to advise volunteers on suitable clothing i.e. if carrying out a beach clean over rocks or uneven terrain, flat covered shoes would be useful.

3. MINIMISING THE POTENTIAL FOR ACCIDENTS / INCIDENTS

- Even with 'one off' or 'occasional' volunteering roles it is important to take appropriate **steps to reduce the potential for accidents**. Different tasks will have different levels of risk attached to them, however, at a minimum; it is advised that a basic **risk assessment** is carried out for all roles. Consider the **area** that the activity will be happening in, whilst taking into account the **role** that the volunteer will be doing. Taking action early on can **avoid** having to deal with difficult situations later. For example, if a person's volunteer role is to direct traffic at a car park during a festival, it is important to check how visible they are to oncoming traffic. A quick risk assessment may highlight the need for the volunteer to be provided with a reflective jacket. This exercise will also flag up relevant health and safety information that should be passed on to volunteers during the briefing. Further information on carrying out a risk assessment is available from <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/fs/doc/publications/risk-assessment-and-volunteering-information-sheet-nl.pdf>.

Insurance

- If you are a small group which comes together for 'one off' events, it is possible to get **insurance cover for the short period** that the event or activity is happening. Sometimes organisations **already have public liability insurance** that covers staff, visitors and volunteers and may also cover any occasional activities that you do.
- It is always useful to **check** with an insurance company to decide what type of cover is required. If there is another organisation or group in your area, that does similar short term activities, it may be useful to check who they use.

Involving Children and or Vulnerable Adults

- The infrequent nature of 'occasional' or 'one off' volunteering means that may not meet the criteria set by the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007¹ and therefore **police checks** (known as AccessNI checks in Northern Ireland) may **not be required**.
- Any volunteering which **extends overnight**² and involves supervising, caring for or having sole responsibility of children or vulnerable adults may meet the criteria set by the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007 and may require an AccessNI check to be carried out.

¹ The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order defines 'frequent' as contact of 1 week or more except in Health where it is 1 month or more. 'Intensive' is 4 or more days in a 30 day period or overnight (between 2am-6am). The full document is available from <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hss/svg/svg-newsroom.htm>. Please note the proposed Vetting and Barring scheme, which falls under the order, is being reviewed, therefore guidance is subject to change.

² Volunteering in a residential setting with children, young people and vulnerable adults is seen as a '[regulated](#)' activity and the fact that it happens overnight qualifies it as 'intensive' contact. Further information can be gained from the Our Duty to Care Team at Volunteer Now.

- It is vital that occasional **roles** are **fully assessed** against the safeguarding guidelines to determine if they qualify for a check or not. Specific roles which involve **'regulated'** activity, and which meet the **'frequent'** or **'intensive'** criteria qualify for a check, under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order. A volunteer should not begin volunteering until the necessary steps have been taken to meet stipulations of the above Order.
- Although police checks may not be required for 'occasional' or 'one off' volunteering, it is useful to make sure that steps are taken to ensure that children and vulnerable adults are properly **supervised and protected**. Good Practice checklists for involving young people and children can be found at <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/publications/?category=7&type=0&Search.x=26&Search.y=12>.
- Some occasional volunteering roles can be suitable for people of all ages and are therefore perfect for encouraging **families** to volunteer together. In this situation it is important to highlight to parents that they are responsible for supervising their own children.
- In situations where the group / organisation are responsible for looking after children or vulnerable adults, certain **simple steps** can be taken to minimise the chances of harm. This includes ensuring that activities happen as a group, or where one to one work is unavoidable, that this happens in an area that is visible to others i.e. person supervising or other volunteers. Where possible, people that have been AccessNI checked should be asked to oversee the group activities. It is important that volunteers are made **aware of expected behaviour** while volunteering.

4. PRACTICES WHILE THE VOLUNTEER IS HELPING OUT

- Ensure that volunteers can make easy **contact with a key person** if information or support is needed. If you are a volunteer led group, it may be useful for each group member to have specific duties which they lead on and are the key contact for.
- Many people help out once a year at a fete or festival. Important things to consider include whether there are adequate facilities for storing personal possessions or having a break. If people are asked to help out over a significant number of hours,

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which extends over normal meal times i.e. over lunch or dinner time or during a hot day, groups / organisations should ideally **provide refreshments and / or food**. Alternatively, if refreshments or snacks cannot be offered by the organisers, volunteers should be **advised to bring their own**. The same approach should be taken to equipment or suitable clothing.

- If appropriate, it is useful to have a **chat or short-brief** with volunteers before and after the activity. A briefing before the activity begins ensures that people know what they are asked to do and are given an opportunity to ask any questions. It is also a good time to distribute any equipment or materials that they will need for the role(s).
- A de-brief gives everyone the chance to offer feedback on how the event went and to **learn** for similar events that could be held in the future. It is also a useful way for organisers to say **thank you**.

5. KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR OCCASIONAL VOLUNTEERS

- You may find it useful to keep a **distribution list** of all the people who have shown an interest in helping your organisation out from 'time to time'. You can then use this contact information to keep them up to date with opportunities, as they arise.
- Also, sending out **newsletters or information** about your group / organisation activities is a useful way of keeping people **connected** to the work that you do, and can act as another way of **recognising** their commitment, if the publicity highlights some of the activities that they were involved in.
- Keeping in touch with occasional volunteers is also a useful way of **communicating** the range of ways that people can help out. Peoples' lifestyle and circumstances can change, so occasional volunteers may turn into regular volunteers, especially if they have had a good experience. Alternatively showing **flexibility** in when and how people can get involved in your group/ organisation is a good way of getting occasional help from people, who are not interested in other more structured forms of volunteering.

6. OTHER RESOURCES YOU MAY FIND USEFUL

The publications section of the Volunteer Now website provides further information on recruitment, risk assessment, insurance, child protection and safeguarding practices for vulnerable adults and support of volunteers. Although focused on the involvement of regular volunteers, there will be other generic information that is useful for occasional volunteer involvement <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/supporting-organisations/publications>.

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Disclaimer

Reasonable precautions have been taken to ensure information in this publication is accurate. However it is not intended to be legally comprehensive; it is designed to provide guidance in good faith without accepting liability. If relevant, we therefore recommend you take appropriate professional advice before taking any action on the matters covered herein. Charity Registration No. NIC101309. Company Limited by Guarantee No. NI602399. Registered in Northern Ireland.