

FACTSHEET: Supporting Volunteers

Volunteers bring energy, passion, and vital skills to your organisation. To help them thrive — and to keep them motivated and fulfilled — it's essential to provide thoughtful and consistent support.

This factsheet shares practical ways to understand, guide, and recognise your volunteers effectively.

Getting to Know Your Volunteers

Taking the time to understand your volunteers is key to creating a meaningful and rewarding experience. Learn about:

- What they enjoy about volunteering
- What motivates them
- Any concerns or challenges they may have
- How other commitments might affect their involvement

Even in large teams, providing regular opportunities for feedback helps volunteers feel valued. This could include:

- One-to-one conversations
- Group discussions or check-ins
- Feedback surveys
- Exit interviews

Understanding your volunteers enables you to:

- Ensure roles remain relevant and purposeful
- Offer new ways to stay engaged
- Continuously improve your volunteer programme

Why Ongoing Support Matters

Support and supervision are essential for a positive, inclusive volunteering environment. Ongoing support allows you to:

- Listen to ideas and concerns
- Give and receive constructive feedback
- Maintain motivation and fulfilment
- Address issues early before they escalate

- Reinforce organisational policies and values
- Encourage personal and skill development
- Build confidence and role clarity

Remember: There's no one-size-fits-all approach. Ask volunteers what kind of support works best for them, whether that's informal chats, structured meetings, or peer support.

More information:

[NCVO: Supporting Volunteers](#)

Ways to Support Volunteers

Induction

A well-structured induction sets the tone for a positive volunteer experience. It should include:

- An introduction to your organisation and its values
- Details of where the volunteer will be based
- Introductions to key staff and other volunteers
- A clear explanation of their role and responsibilities
- Identification of their main point of contact

Informal Support

Informal communication can make a big difference. It helps build trust and keeps conversations open. Try:

- Informal catch-ups
- Social events or casual get-togethers
- Friendly check-ins during or after shifts
- One-to-One Support

Each volunteer should know who to go to for support. This person (identified during induction) should check in regularly to offer guidance, address concerns, and provide feedback.

Peer Support

Pairing new volunteers with experienced ones can help them settle in quickly and build confidence. It also offers leadership opportunities for long-standing volunteers.

Volunteer Meetings

Regular meetings help volunteers:

- Share updates and feedback
- Discuss ongoing projects
- Raise concerns or suggestions
- Connect and feel part of the team

Group Check-ins

In larger organisations, group sessions with a supervisor or coordinator create a space to ask questions, share experiences, and resolve issues together.

Supporting Volunteers with Additional Needs

Volunteering should be inclusive and accessible to everyone. Some volunteers may need additional support and with the right approach, they can participate fully and confidently.

Understand Needs & Create a Support Plan

- Start with a conversation - Talk with the volunteer about their strengths, motivations, and any support needs that might affect their role.
- Create a support plan - Work together to develop an Individual Support Plan (ISP) outlining:
 - Any agreed adjustments
 - Existing support
 - Strategies to help them succeed
- Get consent and share- Ensure the volunteer agrees with the plan and, with their permission, share it with relevant team members.

The plan should be reviewed and updated regularly.

Offer Ongoing Support

- Be flexible- Adapt roles, hours, or locations to meet individual needs.
- Use buddy systems- Pair volunteers with a peer for informal support and guidance.
- Check in regularly- Short, consistent check-ins help address issues early and keep the ISP up to date.
- Encourage open communication- Let volunteers know they can ask for support at any time.

Foster an Inclusive Environment

- Focus on strengths- Celebrate what each volunteer brings to the team.
- Tailor support- Use a person-centred approach — support should reflect each individual's needs.
- Involve support networks- With consent, involve family members, carers, or professionals if helpful.
- Review and adapt- Update the support plan as roles or needs change to keep support relevant.

Inclusion is about removing barriers, not lowering expectations. With the right support in place, every volunteer can make a meaningful contribution.

More information:

[NCVO: Making volunteering more inclusive for disabled people](#)

[NCVO: Equity, diversity and inclusion in volunteering](#)

[NAVCA: Inclusive volunteering guide](#)

Supporting Volunteer Development

Volunteering is also an opportunity for learning and growth.

Informal Development

Many volunteers develop naturally through their involvement. Benefits may include:

- Increased confidence
- New social connections
- New skills learned on the job
- A sense of fulfilment and purpose

Regular support sessions are a great time to revisit motivations and explore new ways to develop.

Formal Development

Some roles may benefit from structured training or learning opportunities. To identify these needs, consider:

- What knowledge or skills are essential for the role?
- Are there new tasks or responsibilities they'd like to try?

- Would training boost their confidence or capability?

Providing relevant training shows that you value their time and want them to succeed.

More information:

[NCVO: Training Volunteers](#)

Offering Volunteer Expenses

Reimbursing expenses removes barriers and ensures everyone has an equal opportunity to volunteer.

Reasonable expenses may include:

- Travel (to and from the volunteering location)
- Meals and refreshments
- Dependent care (children or other dependents)
- Equipment or protective clothing
- Support worker costs (for disabled volunteers)
- Admin costs like postage, calls, stationery

Key points to remember:

- You must only reimburse actual costs — not pay fixed sums or stipends.
- Reimbursements must be supported by receipts and records.
- Overpaying volunteers may create an employment relationship or affect benefits.
- If paying in advance, any unspent money must be returned or deducted from future claims.

Your volunteer expenses policy should include:

- What is covered and any limits (e.g., meal or travel caps)
- How to submit a claim and what documentation is required
- A copy of the expense claim form (including mileage guidance if relevant)
- How and when volunteers will be paid

More information:

[NCVO: Paying Volunteer Expenses](#)

Recognising and Celebrating Volunteers

Recognition doesn't need to be expensive or complicated, but it does need to be genuine.

What Makes Recognition Meaningful?

- Timely and heartfelt
- Frequent and consistent
- Specific to the individual and the achievement
- Encouraging of the behaviours you want to see more of

Everyday Ways to Say Thank You

- A personal "thank you" or handwritten note
- Inviting them to social events or celebrations
- Taking time to check in and listen
- Highlighting contributions in newsletters or meetings
- Prompt expense reimbursement
- Involving them in planning or decision-making
- Offering varied or flexible responsibilities

Special Recognition Ideas

- Nominating volunteers for awards (local or national)
- Inviting them to speak or present at events
- Celebrating years of service
- Offering leadership, training, or mentoring roles
- Creating new roles that align with their strengths or interests

More resources:

[NCVO: Thanking Volunteers](#)

[Volunteero: Rewards and Recognition](#)

Supporting your volunteers isn't about ticking boxes — it's about building meaningful relationships based on respect, communication, and appreciation.

When volunteers feel valued, supported, and involved, they're more likely to stay committed and make a lasting contribution to your organisation.

Further information:

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/supporting-and-managing-volunteers/>

<https://volunteero.org/knowledge-center/how-to-keep-volunteers-motivated>

<https://volunteero.org/knowledge-center/supporting-volunteer-wellbeing>

DRAFT