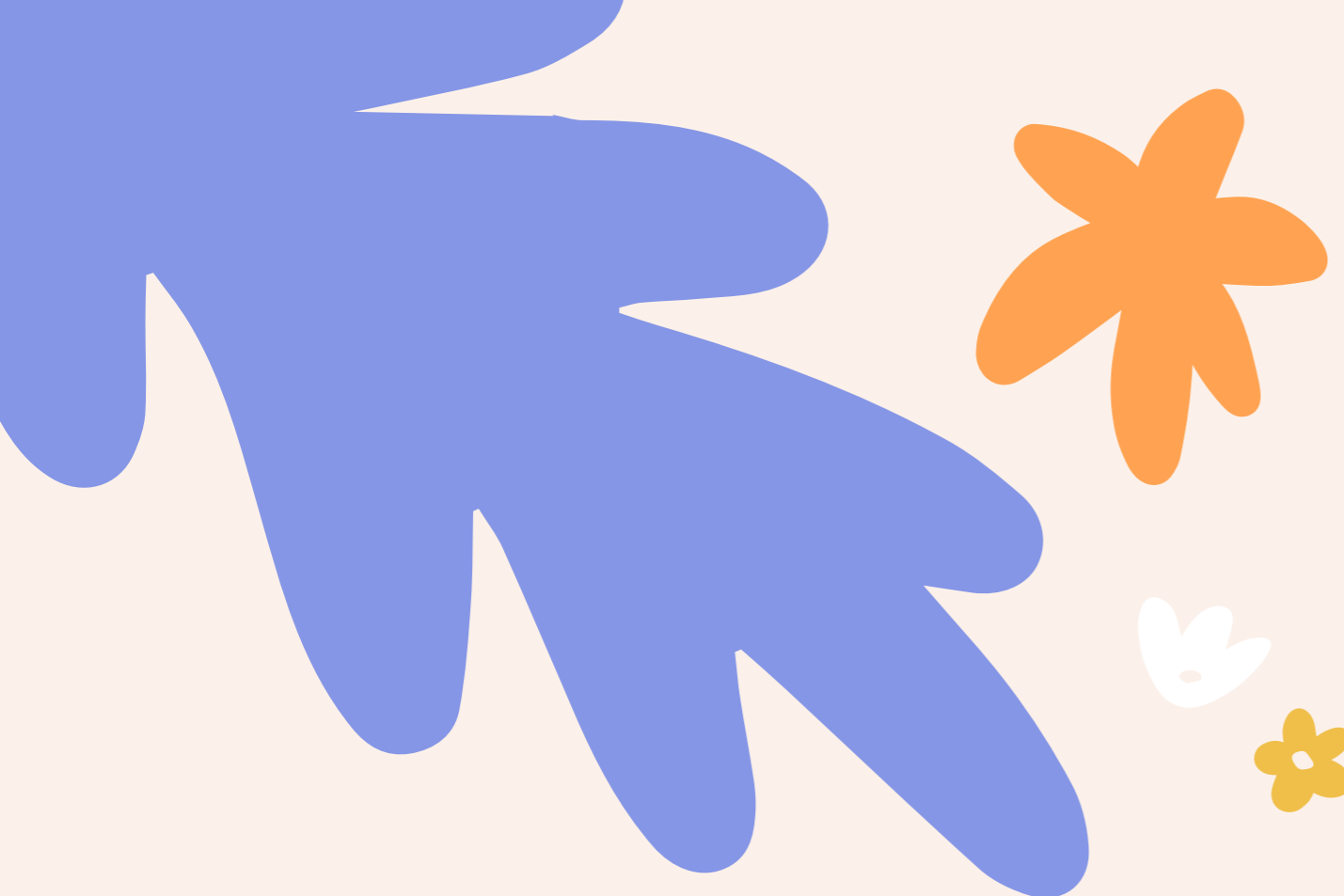




Parks for Health

Volunteer Good Practice Guide



Islington and Camden Parks for Health (PfH) project is one of eight Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) projects chosen across the UK that are finding new ways to manage and fund parks and open spaces across entire towns and cities.



Camden [shared assets]

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Healthy Parks Creators Miriam Ashwell (Friends of Caledonian Park), Suzanne Gibbon (Groundwork UK), Colette Brown (Groundwork UK) and Bhupesh Thapa (London Borough of Islington) . Together, they have utilised their experiences as practitioners in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector to contribute to this guide.

How to use this guide?

- Use as a resource providing ideas, tools and guidance for practitioners to allow those delivering volunteering in parks
- Access to useful website links which can be used for further research and learning resources.

Who is the guide for?

This guide is for anyone who organises or delivers volunteering in parks, such as Friends groups, park rangers, sports coaches, including anyone who shares arts and crafts, cultural activities, meditation, cooking etc. in parks.



Introduction

Volunteering should be something that is beneficial, both to the volunteer and to the organisation or group, and accessible to all.

This means creating meaningful volunteer opportunities that also add value to your organisation, extending what we can achieve together whilst providing worthwhile opportunities and experiences to individuals willing to give their time.

- ✿ Basic practice = travel expenses
- ✿ Good practice = meal expenses
- ✿ Best practice = budget planning for expenses



Volunteering best practice

What does a great volunteering session and program look like?



It is advertised in a range of ways and places, with clear information about what is going to happen and what participants can expect. It is welcoming to all and inspiring about the benefits joining in will give to the volunteer and to the community. It is also safe and well-organised, with public liability insurance, risk assessments for each task, and tools and safety equipment prepared for the session.

Within a single volunteering session, you should aim to give a welcome and an introduction to the tasks being done - for a one-off event this might include a brief history of your organisation and its aims, for repeated sessions it might just go straight to the task outline. Keep each job simple, split it into smaller parts if need be, and ask for any questions.

It should always include a safety briefing - even if that is just a reminder to look out for each other and to ask how each other are. It doesn't have to be boring - you can point out the hazards you are not expecting (sharks, jellyfish) so they will still be listening when you remind people to look out for more likely ones (dog mess or sharp objects sadly) and the easy to forget hazards (roots, thorns). You can do a tool-safety briefing to mime all the ways you can hurt yourself with gardening tools, and it seems to work - no-one has impaled themselves yet!

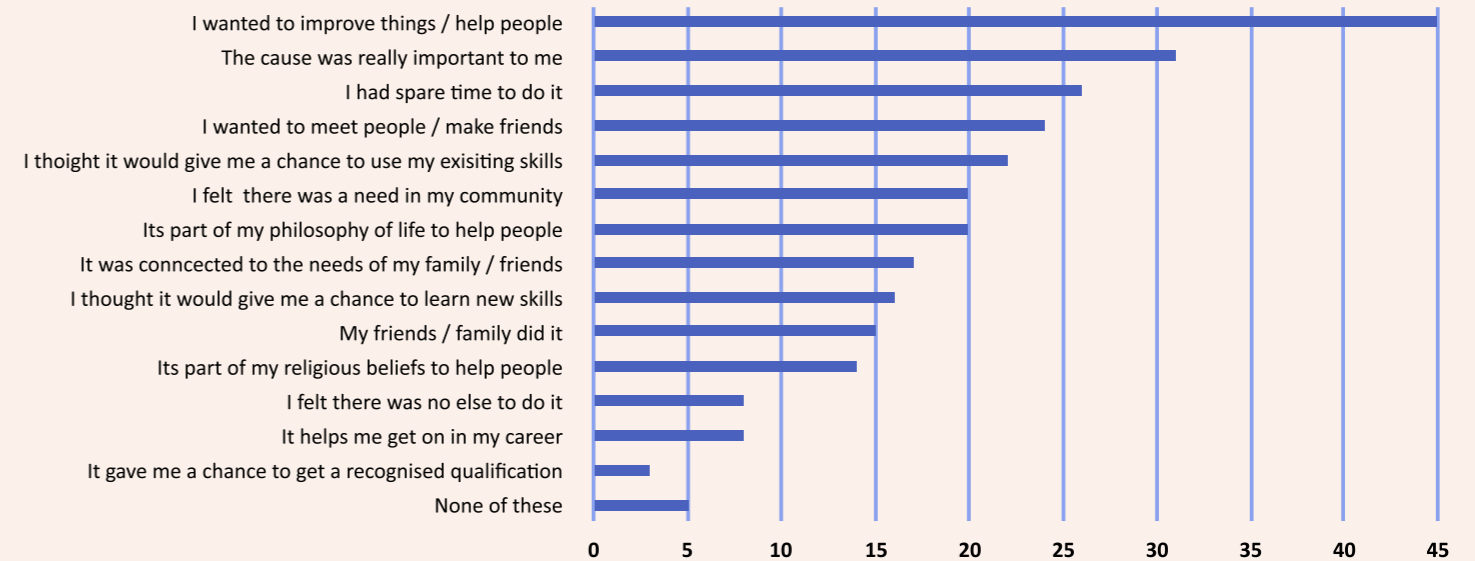
We find the best one-off sessions have a clear self-contained task, changing something horrible into a finished, lovely new something else. And regular volunteers agree that the most satisfying and rewarding sessions are

the ones where you finish a task you've been involved in from start to completion. Don't forget to celebrate, and take photographs before, during and after (with consent). And don't forget to thank everyone, whether that's with tea and biscuits, letting them know what a difference they have made for their local community and your organisation, or a quiet word later.

Longer term, repeat volunteering can be harder to keep interesting and exciting but take a look at the chart below and consider

how you can fulfil people's expectations and motivations. These on-going roles provide a great opportunity for others to volunteer in a wider capacity, perhaps taking on extra tasks like photography and social media, or leading on caring for your compost heap. Do take time to do an induction (and then review at intervals) with each volunteer, as this can provide valuable information about how you can improve your practice, offer training, utilise volunteer skills and experience you weren't aware of, or develop roles further.

Volunteering Motivations



Source - The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NVCO)

Inclusive recruitments

Having a volunteer base of a diverse range of people will allow your organisation to benefit from a range of experience, perspectives, knowledge and skills, therefore bringing in a broader range of ideas, helping your project to reflect the community (see the related diversity and inclusion guide here). Overall it will contribute to making your projects and activities more sustainable in supporting your group to be inclusive and welcoming to all.

Everyone should be able to get involved in volunteering if they would like. However, actual and perceived barriers may prevent or deter someone from volunteering. Making roles inclusive is about supporting people by considering, reducing and working around these.

This starts at recruitment, in how we write role descriptions, how and where we promote opportunities and the application process.

Advice from Camden and Islington local authorities

- Target specific groups.
- Offer one to one sessions to start with.
- Create accessible digital presence, not just signs up in parks. Look at advertising on local volunteering groups (such as Islington Voluntary Action, Voluntary Action Camden), Team London, Council Websites.
- Attend local volunteering recruitment fairs.
- Advertise opportunities through partner organisations.
- Give support to community groups.
- Offer tours of parks or facilities to try to break barrier.

Role descriptions checklist



- Be clear and up front about the nature of the work.
- Clearly state that it is a voluntary role and not paid work to avoid job substitution. If at first glance it appears that a role could be paid this could lead to job substitution.
- Be up front about the expectations of volunteers. This will help to avoid over-commitment, to create healthy barriers and set a tone of transparency between all.
- Encourage participants to notify you of potential access requirements or concerns about the role, so that you can support them to take part. Eg. resource and equipment provision, flexibility for childcare.
- Avoid business-speak, overly wordy or complicated language.
- A clear and accessible expenses policy - Some groups offer travel and any other agreed, out of pocket expenses that can be reimbursed. Allowing participants to know that expenses will be covered should help participants feel looked after.

**Most important is to have a clear expenses policy that is easily available. Volunteering should not cost volunteers any money. Paying expenses for travel, and meals for long shifts helps make volunteering accessible to everyone.*

It's important to get expenses right - We advise that you only ever reimburse 'out of pocket' expenses as a "flat rate" can have implications for 'Universal Credit' and make volunteers liable to taxation. What's more, this kind of agreement can imply the existence of an employment contract, and volunteers might then expect to be paid minimum wage.



Promoting volunteer roles checklist

- ✿ Where do you advertise? Would more targeted advertising such as through newsletters, publications or noticeboards extend your reach to specific groups?
- ✿ Do you expect volunteers to come to you or do you go to them?
- ✿ Remember, not everyone has the same access to the internet, phone credit or is digitally connected.
- ✿ You could consider applying for quality assurance awards or an Investors in Volunteering Award - to give people confidence that you will provide a positive experience for all.



Application forms checklist

- ✿ Do your application forms and processes work for everyone? Those for whom English is not their first language, who might lack confidence, have learning differences or a sensory impairment.
- ✿ Overly complex language, on screen reading, unclear formatting or a protracted or bureaucratic process can be off-putting and challenging to understand.
- ✿ Open days and coffee mornings can be a more accessible way for people to get a sense of your group and of volunteering opportunities, without having to commit themselves.

Coordination

Inductions

An induction is about providing volunteers with the information that will allow them to perform their role safely and effectively. Effective inductions can alter the course of a volunteer's experience and therefore engagement within a role; they set a tone for volunteers unsure how to ask for help, or where to go .

Advice from Camden and Islington local authorities

Welcome: ensure all volunteers are greeted by name and receive a warm welcome.

Have fixed dates and times to keep it regular.

GDPR compliant software is available to manage volunteers e.g. Better Impact (online registration form, software to log emergency contact details, medical conditions, and volunteering hours).

Deliver a consistent service. If you plan any changes, consult volunteers first. However, consistency should not be confused with monotony: be aware that regimented and unchanging tasks may lead to reduced engagement over time.

Inductions Checklist



- ✿ **Be Welcoming.** When inducting a new volunteer we need to remember that volunteers give their time freely. Being grateful, warm and approachable goes a long way.
- ✿ **Introductions.** Meeting and informing volunteers of key staff members is essential so that they know who to report to with questions or problems, and feel confident in asking for help.
- ✿ **Clarity.** Clearly outline the role and provide orientation within the wider organisation - People volunteer for lots of different reasons, being clear here is essential for a volunteer to perform their role. Highlighting the value of their efforts and consequences within a wider group, can encourage greater role satisfaction and engagement.
- ✿ **Policy and Procedures.** You must direct volunteers towards key policies; Health and Safety, personal data, safeguarding and equal opportunities. If this is unlikely to be relevant to their role, they don't necessarily need to read them, but knowing they are there and where to find them is key.
- ✿ **Training.** Prepare volunteers for the role with relevant training.
- ✿ **Encourage.** Get them to ask questions!
- ✿ **Site induction.** Essential for safety, eg. Locating toilets, exits, water, supplies.
- ✿ **Inducting in groups.** If you are recruiting multiple volunteers at once try to coordinate it so that they all have an induction together. This is a great way to build teamwork and for to get to know each other and share learning.
- ✿ **Breaks.** Outline when it is ok to take breaks and have hot drinks at hand.

Support and management



Good support and management is about creating a great volunteer experience; which will help you engage in positive relationships with your volunteers.

Support or supervision

Named contact for support

Volunteers should know where to go with ongoing questions and queries according to their need.

Peer support

Create space for peer support between volunteers, ensuring volunteers are not working in isolation and perhaps pairing volunteers in terms of what they can offer each other. It could be encouragement, companionship or it could be the chance to teach another volunteer and gain confidence in new found skills and abilities in the process.

One to ones

Make time for one to one meetings and monitoring to find opportunities for development, and support volunteer progression. It can be about supporting a volunteer towards their needs and desires within their role, or beyond it. Really good volunteer management will be flexible and creative in tailoring roles and finding opportunities that will be great for volunteers themselves.

Rewards and recognition

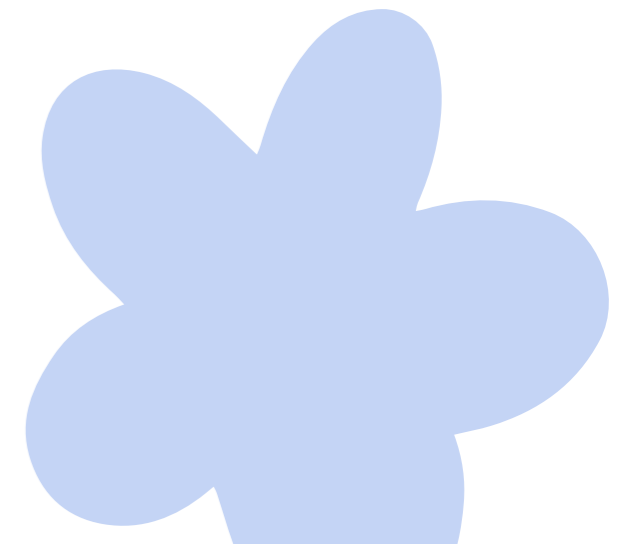
Expressing appreciation of volunteer contributions goes a long way and helps to create a positive culture, something we should always strive to. Rewards and recognition can be formal or informal.

Here are a few ideas:

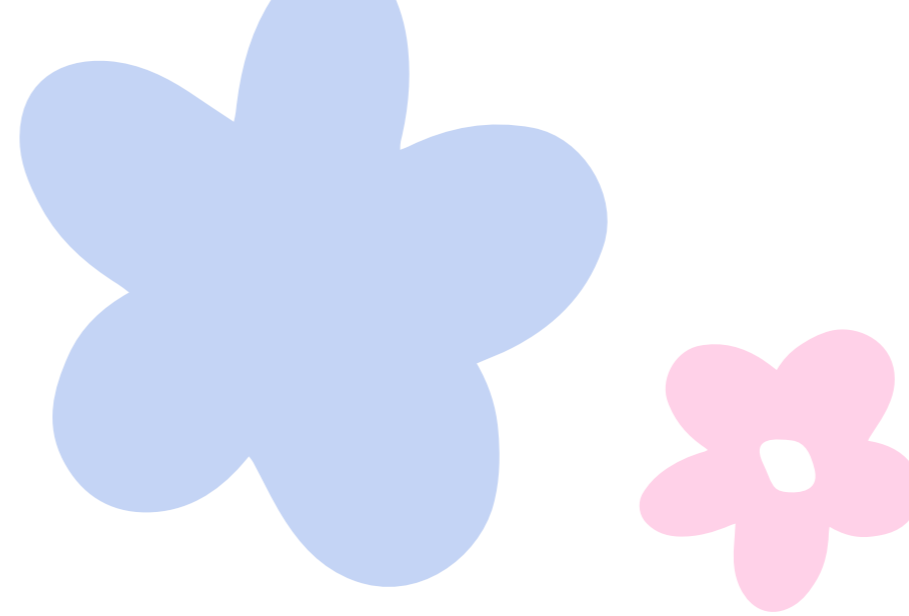
- A simple thank you after a shift
- Certificates or awards
- Praise and recognition for individual or group achievements
- Volunteer appreciation events such as a summer picnic or winter party
- Inclusive social events
- Offering to write them a reference for a job application
- Offering training opportunities
- Some boroughs offer time credits for volunteering. [Click here](#) to find out more.

Advice from Local Authority

- Provide a welcome pack, professional management
- Have a central contact point
- Volunteering policies and procedures
- Refreshments available at each session
- Different volunteers prefer different levels of variation: some people prefer to be consistent, and others prefer to switch it up. Ask your volunteers what works best for them
- Be adaptable
- Don't become complacent with Health and Safety. You may notice someone stops wearing safety goggles as it gets hot. Think of ways to overcome such problems, for example: offering more breaks, water or changing tasks.



Sustaining involvement



Volunteer development

Identified motivation, needs and interests are met by relevant training and development opportunities.

To get the best out of your volunteers it is really important to **understand individual motivations**. There are many reasons why people volunteer. These can be about doing what they can for a cause close to them, it could be about finding community, or it could be related to gaining skills and experience. Offering training opportunities, especially ones that would be meaningful to the volunteer can be a great way to build volunteer engagement.

Remaining flexible to volunteer needs

Being **flexible** in terms of volunteer roles is key – this could be working with the volunteer to tailor their role around their personal motivations, what brings them joy, or it could be making reasonable adjustments to hours or expectations in accordance with a volunteers evolving needs for sustained and comfortable participation.



Organisational involvement and feedback

Volunteers hold unique insights and perspectives: from the intricacies of how volunteering activities are carried out, to their sense of the wider group, organisation or structure, their own experience or the relationships between a group and the wider community. These insights are an asset, and encouraging a healthy culture of feedback is a great part of the constant process of building and improvement.

Have trust in your volunteers to create strong and trusting relationships. Learn what makes volunteers stay, as well as issues of concern and look for solutions.

Exit interviews

These can be an effective way to get a sense of why participants are leaving. This may be within or without your realm of control - either way they are a great opportunity for thanking people for their work and time.

Resolving difficulties

Working with volunteers can be fun, dynamic and easy - especially with a base of strong inductions, support and management . However, as with anything, sometimes things go wrong, so you need to be prepared.

Problem solving process

Common issues to be weary of:

- Poor communication
- Expectations of one party not met
- A complaint
- Personality clash
- Issues with performance, conduct or behaviour
- Relationship breakdowns

These issues can arise between staff and volunteers or between volunteers. In all instances it is important that we respond appropriately to resolve or learn from them to prevent them happening in the future.

The following steps can be taken to avoid or appease conflicts and problems:

Oral or informal stage

Sit down with key parties and talk through the issue – remember to remain impartial and be an active listener.

Opportunity to explain

Everyone involved should be given equal opportunity to raise the issues and explain any misunderstandings.

Opportunity for external mediation

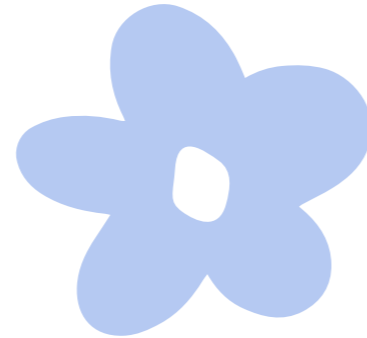
If there is no impartial party to mediate then it is advised to find someone from another team, department or HR to mediate.



Written or formal stage

If it requires a more formal mediation make sure your agreement with next steps is written in an email and sent to everyone involved – be open and transparent. Remember a key reason things go wrong is poor communication. It would be recommended that even with an informal conversation that the key discussion is written down and sent to all parties involved. This allows everyone to reflect and comment if there were any misunderstandings.

Key policies and procedures



Policies and procedures

Having a set policy and looking to the policy of other organisations is invaluable when deciding on an appropriate response to a situation. Making these available to volunteers will help to assure volunteers who might have concerns, of how to raise them and that they will be resolved.

Put in place

Key Policies and Procedures to have in place

- Equality and Diversity policy
- Expenses policy
- Health and Safety including risk assessing volunteer activities
- Safeguarding POLICY
- Insurance (public liability or employers liability)
- Raising concerns process
- Confidentiality and Whistleblowing
- Exit interview



London's Volunteer Management Charter

When in doubt you should use the London's [Volunteer Management Charter](#) as a good guide:

Equality and diversity

Volunteering is open to all and volunteers are treated with fairness

Expenses

Travel, and any other agreed, out of pocket expenses are reimbursed

Induction

Volunteers are introduced to the work and ethos of the organisation

Organisational involvement

Volunteers have influence and an informed voice on organisational issues

Personal development

Identified needs are met by relevant training and development opportunities

Recruitment process

Recruitment procedures are fair, efficient and consistent

Resolving difficulties

Volunteers are aware of how to raise a concern, and how it will be handled

Reward and recognition

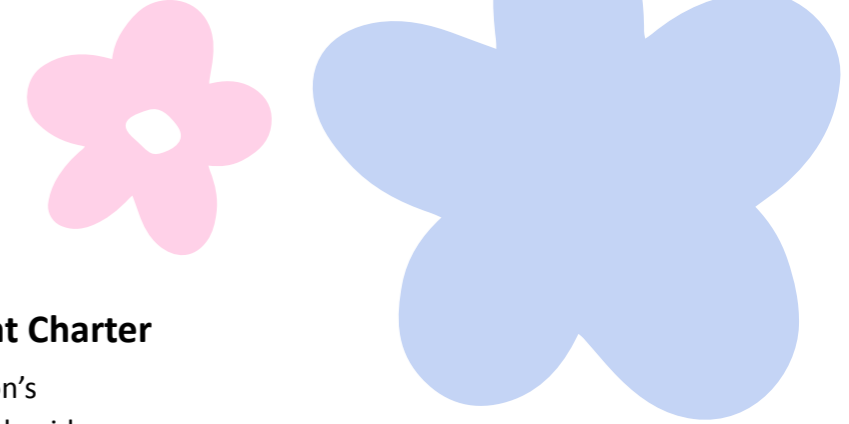
The organisation expresses its appreciation of the volunteers' contribution

Safe environment

The physical and emotional risks of volunteering are identified, minimised, and covered by adequate insurance

Support

A named supervisor ensures ongoing support appropriate to need



Glossary

Expenses

Have a clear expenses policy that is easily available. Travel, and any other agreed, out of pocket expenses are reimbursed. Volunteering should not cost the volunteer any money.

Paying expenses for travel and meals, for long shifts, helps make volunteering accessible to everyone. It's important to get expenses right - You should only ever reimburse volunteers for out of pocket expenses. Paying volunteers a "flat rate" for their expenses can have implications for 'Universal Credit' and make volunteers liable for taxation. What's more, this kind of agreement can imply the existence of an employment contract, and volunteers can then expect to be paid minimum wage.

Mutual benefit

Volunteering should be something that is beneficial, both to the volunteer and to the organisation or group. For example:

- ▮ Peer support should be available
- ▮ Your volunteering group should have a positive culture
- ▮ Time Credits - some boroughs offer time

Safe Volunteering Environment

The physical and emotional risks of volunteering are identified, minimised and covered by adequate insurance credits.

Job Substitution

A Volunteer role is one which improves or extends the service you offer e.g. during the pandemic, thousands of volunteers have been welcoming people to vaccination centres; this is not a core part of the service however it relieves pressure from key workers and improves the experience of service users which has a meaningful impact.

- ▮ It is easy to avoid job substitution:
- ▮ Pay volunteer expenses, but not in excess of actual costs incurred
- ▮ Never mix a person's role between sessional and volunteering work
- ▮ Never impose obligations of the length of time a volunteer must take part
- ▮ Be health and safety compliant
- ▮ Be clear that it is a voluntary role

Learning library

Link 1:

IA blog on volunteer best practice discussing recruitment and retention of volunteers

Link 4:

A link to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations directory of training courses.

Link 2:

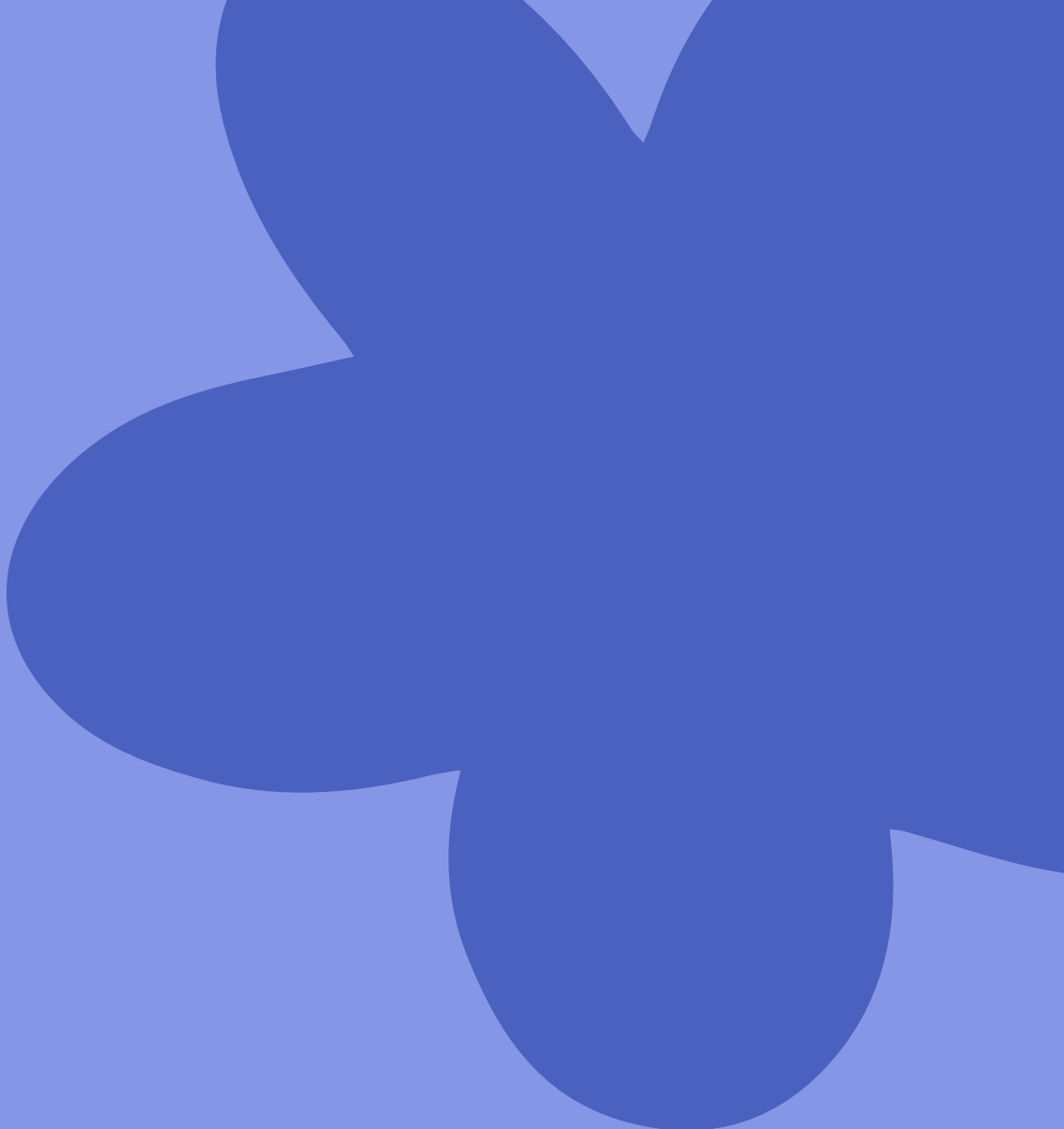
A variety of good practice resources provided by Sheffield Volunteer centre.

Link 5:

A link to the Investors in Volunteering Award.

Link 3:

The London Volunteer Management Charter.



Camden



ISLINGTON
For a more equal future

[shared assets]