

Start small

Choose 2-3 opportunities and investigate them fully - don't commit to too many interviews.

Time is precious

If you can't make an interview please let the organisation know as soon as you can - they often invest valuable time and resources in arranging interviews.

Ask questions!

When you ring an organisation, be prepared with a list of things you would like to know. This telephone call can help both you and the organisation decide whether you wish to proceed further with recruitment. Your answers to the questions on page 2 of this leaflet may be helpful to you here.

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Are you thinking of volunteering?

What's so good about volunteering?

Volunteering can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience which can give you the opportunity to meet people, gain new skills, or move into paid employment. It can also enable you to use existing skills, add structure to your life or support a cause that is important to you.

At Brighton & Hove Volunteer Centre we have details of over 300 current volunteering roles. With such a wide range of opportunities it can sometimes be difficult to decide what to do. Thinking about the following issues might help you to decide...

Why do you want to volunteer?

It is important to think about why you want to volunteer and what you would like to achieve - this can help you decide which opportunities are suitable for you and which aren't. It can also help you ask the right questions when you speak to an organisation e.g. if you want to meet new people you will need to ask whether you will be volunteering with other people - you don't want to end up in an office by yourself!

Why do people choose to volunteer?

People volunteer for various different reasons and get different benefits from doing voluntary work. Some of the most common reasons for volunteering are:

- To use existing skills or gain new ones
- To move into, or return to, paid employment
- To change career direction or to develop your career
- To socialise with other people
- To add structure to your daily life
- To support a particular cause
- To access training
- To feel useful and productive
- As a compulsory part of a course or training
- To feel part of the local community

Finding the right volunteering role for you

People are much more likely to stick with a volunteering opportunity if the practicalities of the role match their own circumstances. To avoid disappointment, you might want to consider the following questions...

- What times am I available?
- When can I start?
- Can I get there easily?
- Does the organisation pay expenses?
- How long can I volunteer for?
- Do I need extra support to carry out the role?

This is not designed to exclude you from volunteering but to identify whether you can do the specified role without risk to your health or that of others. It is also to ensure you can be adequately supported. Even if an organisation doesn't ask about health issues, there are certain circumstances where it makes sense to notify them e.g.

- where others' awareness is central to your own and their safety e.g. if you have epilepsy or diabetes
- where your health issue may affect your volunteering e.g. if you have a chronic illness which may affect your reliability or your ability to perform certain tasks
- where you think you might need extra support in your role on account of your health issue e.g. learning difficulties, memory loss

Who do I need to inform about my volunteering?

If you are in receipt of benefits, you should let your local benefit office advisor know before you start volunteering. If you are intending on using your car for voluntary work, let your insurance company know.

What do I do next?

Starting in a new volunteering role often involves activities such as completing forms, undertaking interviews, making phone calls, attending training etc.

Each of these tasks requires energy being invested by both you and the organisation, so before getting started you might want to consider the following ...

Who pays for a CRB check?

The cost will normally be covered by the organisation you are applying to. If you have already had a CRB check done it may, in some circumstances, be transferable. If not, you will need to undertake a completely new check.

How long will a CRB check take?

Normally 4-6 weeks, but occasionally longer. In some circumstances you may not be able to start volunteering until your CRB check has been fully processed.

How does this affect me?

Don't let a CRB check put you off a volunteering role that you want to do. However, you should bear in mind the practicalities e.g. if you are only available for 2 months, a role that requires a CRB check would not be advisable as it may take this long to process.

Also, make sure you really want to go ahead with the volunteering role before time and money is spent on a CRB check. Importantly, if you do have a criminal record it does not necessarily mean you won't be able to volunteer. For further advice about criminal record issues please contact the NACRO Resettlement Plus Helpline on 020 7840 6464 or Freephone 0800 0181 259. The phone-line is open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

Health issues

Organisations may ask if you have any physical or mental health issues that might affect your role as a volunteer.

Other things to consider

As part of the recruitment process the organisation needs to establish if you are suitable for the role in question. This may include asking you about:

- Your previous experience
- Your skills
- The reasons why you want to volunteer
- Your health
- Any extra support requirements you might have e.g. If you have English as a second language

Organisations will usually ask you for references and, depending on the role, may carry out a CRB (Criminal Record Bureau) check - there is more information on this on pages 6-7 of this leaflet.

Please ask us if you have concerns or questions about any of these factors. It is important to be honest when addressing these questions as they are designed to help you select the most suitable role.

A good match is more likely to mean a good volunteering experience - something both you and the organisation would like!

Getting started

Once you have decided you want to apply for a particular volunteering role you should contact the organisation by phone or email to let them know you are interested in volunteering with them.

Most organisations aim to respond promptly, but some have limited resources; so, if necessary, leave a message and allow a few days for them to respond.

What will happen after I've contacted them?

The organisation should get back in touch and invite you for an interview or informal chat. The method of recruitment varies depending on the organisation and the type of volunteering roles they have, but it will typically involve one or more of the following:

- An informal chat
- Completing an application form
- Attending an interview
- Providing references
- Undertaking a Criminal Record Bureau check

The recruitment process is an opportunity for you and the organisation to find out about each other and decide whether you want to move forward with the role.

Interviews

Interviews for voluntary roles are not 'competitive' in the same way as they are for paid jobs and are normally much more relaxed... so don't panic! Whilst skills and experience can be important, reliability and enthusiasm are two of the main qualities organisations are looking for in their volunteers. An interview is an opportunity for you to ask any questions that you may have e.g.

- What exactly will I be doing?
- What support and/or training is available?

- Who is responsible for my support?
- Who do I go to if I have any problems?
- Are volunteers insured for the tasks they perform?

What sort of references will I need?

If you don't have 'employment' references, don't worry - organisations differ in the people they accept as referees and how long they have to have known you.

Organisations will generally accept referees from a variety of places other than just paid work, such as:

- Tutors
- Friends
- Religious ministers
- Employment advisers
- Probation officers
- Neighbours
- Support workers
- Day centre workers
- Health professionals

If you are finding it hard to get referees, let the organisation know - in some instances they may be able to work around this.

CRB checks

If you will be volunteering with vulnerable people or will have access to sensitive information you may be asked to undertake a Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) check. This is a report into your background that an organisation can request if they are advertising a position working with children, the elderly or the vulnerable.

In certain circumstances it is a legal requirement of organisations that they carry out these checks.