

Volunteering Opportunities Guidance Document – Volunteer Centre Brighton & Hove September 2011

Introduction

This document outlines the key factors upon which the Volunteer Centre Brighton & Hove selects volunteering opportunities which it will (or wont) advertise and promote through its networks. It is designed to assist the decision making process when assessing the suitability of opportunities prior to loading them on to our networks.

Key principles underline decision-making at all times:

- The Volunteer Centre believes in creating and not stifling opportunity and recognises that volunteer involvement takes place in a variety of ways (ongoing, one-off, full-time), across all four sectors (third, statutory, private and social enterprise) and within a multitude of structures (e.g. charity, grass-roots group, co-operative, association)
- The Centre does not undertake a ‘policing’ role but is there to support organisations in the best management of volunteers and that good management may be relative to the organisational structure/context and way in which volunteers are involved
- Volunteers should be well-managed, treated equally, fairly and with respect
- Quality of information is key in enabling volunteers to make discerning choices as to the roles they undertake

The Volunteer Centre Brighton & Hove reserves the right to ‘not’ list volunteering opportunities where it feels this is appropriate.

Policy

I. Overseas Volunteering Opportunities

Overseas opportunities are split into two areas, overseas opportunities where the opportunity provider is located overseas and ones where the provider is located in the UK.

Do-it publish information regarding overseas opportunities, and have a dedicated ‘Overseas’ volunteering section to their website to which both types of organisations as outlined above should be signposted partners@do-it.org

Where a UK based organisation ALSO hosts UK based opportunities in addition to overseas opportunities, these may be registered in the normal way.

II. Cause-based volunteering

Faith-based Organisations

Volunteering within faith-based communities and faith-driven is supported by the Volunteer Centre and the Centre holds a neutral position in relation to the faiths held by volunteers and/or organisations that might involve them. Moreover, decisions to register volunteering opportunities within faith-based groups will be made on the principle that they support an ethos of equalities and diversity and do not promote beliefs that serve to discriminate against people on the basis of faith, gender, sexuality, age, and/or ethnic origin.

Specifically, the Centre will not support opportunities where the sole aim of the organisation is to further its own belief systems and/or utilise volunteering as a 'recruitment' mechanism.

Political

The Volunteer Centres does not generally accept volunteering opportunities from Political parties (and affiliated pressure and/or lobbying groups) where the mainstay of the role is to further their party political aims and/or beliefs.

Consideration may be given where the 'cause' can be seen to be discrete from Political motivations and both the organisational aims and objectives and volunteer role should clearly reflect this.

III Good Practice Issues

Opportunity registration requests details on good practice issues relating to how the organisation will manage volunteers. The details outlined here (including gaps) will be assessed against good volunteer management practice before the opportunity is accepted. This assessment will take into consideration the structure of the organisation, context and the volunteer role. For example a small volunteer-led organisation that does not cover travel expenses might prompt different action to a large Charity demonstrating the same practice.

Roles that might require specialised training/induction should state that within this section, and so should insurance status, especially where risks are involved, i.e. public spaces, animals, working alone etc.

It is the Centre's role to 'advise' on these issues and will not necessarily mean the opportunity is not accepted. Where the practice in volunteer management poses a risk to the volunteer (physical and/or financial) and/or in total does not present a positive volunteering experience the Centre will not accept the opportunity.

Further still, volunteering roles are not contractual and should not by their very nature 'create' a contract that imposes obligations upon volunteers as opposed to 'reasonable expectations'. Where a volunteering role is seen to create 'unpaid' workers it will not be accepted.

Likewise, where organisations are using volunteering as a means with which to bypass their legal obligations with regards employment law the role will not be accepted e.g. where a volunteering role is being used as an 'unpaid' probationary period.

IV Volunteers having to pay – hidden costs

All costs that the volunteer is likely to incur should be clearly stated and have a clear rationale.

There should be due consideration given as to why the volunteer is going to be charged or have to pay membership fees, and that the volunteering opportunity isn't being used as a method of recruitment or gaining new donors. In this case the opportunity would not be accepted by the Centre.

V Health and Safety

Volunteering should take place in a safe environment and a safe manner for the volunteer, the host organisation and potential service users. Volunteers should be covered by a health & safety policy the same as any other member of staff and should have appropriate insurance cover for the activities undertaken. Where insurance is not present Volunteers should be made aware of their liability. Opportunities relating to driving should show explicit detail with regards to the volunteer and organisation responsibilities and requirements with respect to the law.

Procedure

- All new volunteering opportunity registrations should be read thoroughly
- Any issues identified from the above should be highlighted
- Missing details and/or further clarity on an issue should be sought from an organisation before entering the opportunity
- Where appropriate/possible, organisations should be directed to our Good Practice Guide and Volunteer Managers' Forum for further support with volunteer management
- Where clarity and information result in the possibility of NOT accepting an opportunity the Volunteer Centre Project Leader should be consulted
- The Volunteer Centre Project Leader will make the ultimate decision to refuse an opportunity
- The VC PL may seek guidance in the above from their Line Manager
- Any organisation whose volunteering opportunity has been refused will be notified with a clear explanation as to why including a copy of this policy document

Related Documents and References

1. [Guidelines for Organisations Volunteer Centre Brighton & Hove March 2011](http://www.bh-impetus.org/volunteer_centre)
2. <https://www.do-it.org/magazine/features/overseas/ethical-volunteering-overseas>
3. <https://www.do-it.org/magazine/features/overseasvolunteering>

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