

# Volunteering pack

Staff as  
volunteers



# Introduction

This document looks at how employers can support their staff with volunteering and outlines the benefits to staff and the organisation of volunteering. It outlines the different types of programme, policies and agreements, and highlights sources of further information.

## Employer-supported volunteering

Many NHS employers support their staff to volunteer or engage with voluntary bodies. Employer-supported volunteering programmes<sup>1</sup> can mean employers supporting staff who are already volunteering, developing a volunteer programme with a community partner or creating an in-house volunteering programme for staff.

Volunteering England research found that successful volunteer programmes gave employers a positive profile, not only in the local community but with other businesses, customers and staff. Staff were more likely to stay with the organisation and felt more motivated and positive about it.

## The benefits for staff

Staff volunteer for many reasons, from wanting to develop new skills to making friends or giving something back to the community. Encouraging staff to take up volunteering opportunities has a positive impact on health and well-being and follows good practice for achieving work/life balance and personal development. There are many benefits for staff:

- it can contribute to an individual's lifelong learning
- it can help to improve staff motivation and develop skills such as communication, problem solving, change management and innovation
- it enables staff to develop their skills in a way not necessarily possible in their day-to-day role, such as project management, administration, telephone skills
- the skills developed through volunteering may be relevant under the Knowledge and Skills Framework
- volunteering as a group can also be considered a means of team development
- it can give people a feeling of personal pride and fulfilment, of feeling valued, and being able to give something back to the NHS or the wider community
- volunteering can help to make a positive difference to a community or individual and increase personal awareness of local issues.
- it has been shown to have a beneficial effect on personal and mental well-being.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteer England: Employer supported volunteering – the guide.  
McBain, C and Amanda Jones, A (2005)  
[www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/publications/old.htm](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/publications/old.htm)

- staff can gain an understanding how other parts of the organisation work, for example office staff participating in volunteer projects (such as patient feeding programmes or visiting schemes) on wards gain a better understanding of the roles ward staff undertake.

## The benefits for the organisation

Supporting staff to volunteer is advantageous for an employer. It encourages staff to have a positive view of their employer, and to feel proud to work for them. It can expose staff to a much wider range of tasks than they may get in their day-to-day work, give them an opportunity to lead projects and have responsibility for motivating others.

- Staff going out on community projects can act as ambassadors for the organisation.
- Employers with successful volunteering programmes find that they benefit from a positive image, staff are proud to work for them, potential employees want to join them, customers feel good about using them, and partners want to work with them.<sup>3</sup>
- Staff choosing to volunteer send a clear message to employers about what they value, what issues matter to them and their commitment to making a difference.
- Staff feel a sense of fulfilment, feel valued by the organisation and feel they are making a positive difference to other people's lives.
- It can help to improve morale and reduce stress levels.
- Volunteer projects within the organisation help to improve employees' understanding of how the organisation works.
- Staff experience different ways of working which may be applied to their paid work.
- Volunteering can have an impact on retention within the NHS, helping to reduce the loss of trained and experienced staff that may otherwise consider leaving, and also help to prevent burn out.

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<sup>2</sup> *Volunteering and Health: what impact does it really have?*

Final report to Volunteering England:

[www.volunteering.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/AB46F9EC-CADB-4ABB-AE-8A850F09AE32/0/FullReportLampeter2ndJuly2008.pdf](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/AB46F9EC-CADB-4ABB-AE-8A850F09AE32/0/FullReportLampeter2ndJuly2008.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *Volunteering England: Employer supported volunteering – the guide:*

[www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/goodpracticebank/Specialist+Themes/Employer+Supported+Volunteering/index.htm](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/goodpracticebank/Specialist+Themes/Employer+Supported+Volunteering/index.htm)

# Types of volunteering

Volunteering schemes vary from organisation to organisation. Some NHS trusts allocate a set number of hours per month or year during work time for staff to volunteer, while others will offer time off to an employee to try out a volunteering role before they commit to doing something in their own time. Other trusts work with partners to develop volunteering programmes for their staff, either in or out of work time.

While there is no obligation for an employer to offer support to staff who wish to volunteer, most do. Each organisation will need to decide what its policy is and ensure that staff understand how this applies to them.

## Volunteer policy and agreement

Employers supporting volunteers within their organisation should have a policy statement that helps to define the role of volunteers and the process for recruitment, induction, training and reimbursement of expenses. It should also outline management responsibilities, the recognition volunteers will receive and how volunteers can expect to be treated.

All volunteers should sign an agreement to show that they understand what is required of them, and it is good practice for staff who also volunteer for their employing organisation to sign this agreement.

## External programmes

Programmes that take place outside your organisation usually mean that staff will need to take time away from work, or participate in their own time. Employers should consider what flexible working options they might provide for staff who want to undertake community activities. External programmes can be regular, such as helping the local Brownies, or a time-bound project, either in the UK or overseas. For longer projects, staff may need to take a sabbatical or unpaid leave.

## Internal programmes

Staff volunteering within the organisation they work for should not undertake any role that would have any relation to their paid work. Volunteering should be in another part of the organisation, ideally a different department or site. This type of volunteering should always be carefully thought out and taken forward in partnership with staff-side organisations. It can be valuable for gaining a better understanding of how an organisation works, developing new skills, understanding other people's roles and helping to facilitate cross-organisational relationships. Where organisations have in-house volunteer programmes, an employee volunteering policy should be in place, alongside a staff volunteer agreement.

When developing roles for staff to volunteer within the organisation, care should also be taken to ensure that the volunteer roles are not regarded as 'corporate giving'. This is defined as follows:

“Corporate philanthropy or corporate giving is the act of corporations donating some of their profits, or their resources, to non-profit organisations. However, employees may donate their time to the organisation to volunteer to provide a service or engage in an activity for which they are not paid but which may benefit the company or its customers.

Corporations most commonly donate cash, but they also donate the use of their facilities, property, services, or advertising support. They may also set up employee volunteer groups that then donate their time.”

The most common form of corporate giving is making donations to local, national and international organisations or appeals, which can include employers matching the funds employees have raised. An increasing number of employers organise their charitable giving through their own foundation. Business in the Community looks at why and how companies set up foundations in a report that highlights the advantages, disadvantages and the top tips that companies have shared with them. The report and more information on corporate giving can be found on the Business in the Community website: [www.bitc.org.uk/resources/publications/corporate.html](http://www.bitc.org.uk/resources/publications/corporate.html)

## Overseas programmes

NHS staff may volunteer for overseas projects to gain new skills and knowledge, to put something back into the community they came from, and sometimes to offer help in a time of crisis.

Staff considering overseas work with aid agencies or working abroad in another capacity, should be made aware of a number of factors and encouraged to plan carefully. They should:

- discuss, and agree in detail with their line manager and HR department, their options for unpaid leave, return to work, and any retraining they may need
- recognise the need to raise some or all of their own expenses, depending upon which agency they are working with
- check the agency they hope to work for before signing up or handing over any fees or money, and look carefully at insurance options for the type of work and country they are going to
- check the situation in the country they are going to, including politics, cultural differences and travel warnings. See the Foreign Office website: [www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas](http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas)
- check that the break in employment won't result in the suspension of membership of the NHS Pension Scheme. See [www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/pensions](http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/pensions)
- see whether they need to take out separate medical malpractice cover
- be aware that in the wake of a natural disaster, aid agencies usually don't require extra emergency staff but rely on their own relief workers and local recruitment.

Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) is the most widely known agency in the UK for people who volunteer overseas, but is not the only option available. Placements with VSO can last from six months to two years, and may be in the UK or overseas. The Government has committed £13 million so that UK public sector workers who volunteer for between seven and 24 months will have their pension costs covered while they're overseas. For more information visit the VSO website: [www.vso.org.uk/volunteer/why-volunteer/volunteering-benefits.asp](http://www.vso.org.uk/volunteer/why-volunteer/volunteering-benefits.asp)<sup>4</sup>

More information about other volunteering opportunities overseas (and resource guides) is available on the Volunteering England website: [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)

## Financial assistance for staff

The Department of Health (DH), the British Medical Association (BMA) and the Royal College of Nursing have made a fund available to cover incidental expenses of teams undertaking humanitarian projects in developing nations. Applications to the humanitarian fund may be made by an individual or staff group within the NHS or special health authority. Applications from multidisciplinary teams are particularly welcome.

For more information, email [internationalinfo@bma.org.uk](mailto:internationalinfo@bma.org.uk) or visit the BMA website: [www.bma.org.uk](http://www.bma.org.uk)

## Volunteer Reserve Forces

Although members of the Volunteer Reserve Forces (VRF), who receive payment for their time, are not volunteers in the correct sense of the term,<sup>5</sup> the positive contribution this can make to their work and the commitments required are similar to volunteering.

Employees who volunteer as reservists can bring back to their organisation military discipline, skills and knowledge that may not be present in the civilian workforce.

It is useful to know the military commitments and how they could affect reservists in your organisation, including where you stand if they're mobilised. SaBRE (Supporting Britain's Reservists and Employers) provides information relating to employing reservists, including the legal aspects of employing someone in the VRF, on its website [www.sabre.mod.uk](http://www.sabre.mod.uk). It also runs a phone helpline on 0800 389 5459 and has a network of regional contacts who can provide information on a local basis.

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<sup>4</sup> This information was correct at the time of publication

<sup>5</sup> Someone who spends their time: 'unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment, individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives'

# Costs and potential disadvantages of NHS staff volunteering

The cost of supporting staff to volunteer is often minimal when balanced with the considerable benefits to the organisation. Employers should view volunteering as a positive activity that can contribute to an employee's lifelong learning, retention, lower stress levels and higher morale. Some forms of volunteering can be recorded on personal development plans, and are relevant to the Knowledge and Skills Framework.

Volunteering Plus is a Business in the Community service that recognises and accredits the work of employee volunteers. It provides a framework that captures the learning and development gained from volunteering, which in turn is accredited by City & Guilds. It also helps companies to identify increases in their own skills base. For more information, visit the **Business in the Community website**.

Occasionally, staff may wish to undertake a longer-term project, which could involve taking unpaid leave or a sabbatical. This type of activity has larger cost implications for the employer in terms of replacing staff, recruitment and other related costs. When considering the options for supporting a member of staff with this, careful planning and thought will need to be given as to how the organisation will manage the process and what the impact will be on the staff still in post. There is also a risk that staff who have taken leave to volunteer may not return.

Viewed positively, however, the situation can offer other staff the opportunity for temporary promotion, the chance for a team to try new ways of working and the chance for new staff to join the team. Staff often return from their volunteering experience refreshed, motivated and with new skills and knowledge to share with the organisation.

## Contact us

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