

Involving Volunteers Best Practice Guide Sheet

Volunteer Expenses

Although it is an individual's decision to give time freely to volunteer, they should not be out of pocket when doing so. Reimbursing reasonable out-of-pocket expense such as travel, helps removes barriers to volunteering and supports a culture that values volunteers. Without reimbursing expenses, only those who can afford to volunteer do so, excluding others and limiting the diversity and value of volunteering.

The reimbursement of expenses should always be talked about and actively promoted - not just written into policies. All volunteers should be encouraged to claim and be informed about your expenses policy through different methods: recruitment, induction, volunteer handbook, volunteer policy, 1:2:1's/supervisions, team meetings and regular communications. Volunteers may want to or need to claim expenses but are hesitant to do so because they:

- Feel uncomfortable or ashamed to ask
- Worry they'll be perceived as needy
- Don't see other claiming and assume its discouraged
- Fear they are causing an inconvenience

An automatic assumption shouldn't be made that people don't need to or want reimbursement. Normalise the process by regularly checking in with all volunteers about their expenses. This helps remove any stigma and reinforces that claiming is a standard practice.

What can be reimbursed?

It's good practice to reimburse:

- Travel to and from the place of volunteering
- Travel occurred due to volunteering for example team meetings, 1:1's/supervisions
- Refreshments bought – for example buying coffee when befriending
- Meals (generally if someone has volunteered more than 4 hours in one day)
- Postage, phone calls, stationary
- Cost of protective clothing
- Care of dependents whilst volunteering (*it's recognised that due to costs organisations may not have the necessary finances to do so*)

If an organisations budget is limited a maximum cap can be set, for example mileage distance, meal cost, taxi costs – to be clear upfront about what can or cannot be covered.

Making and processing expense claims

It's important that only genuine out-of-pocket expenses are reimbursed, not: fixed sums, stipends, session payments, rewards (including vouchers), regular gifts or providing training that's not relevant for the role. Also don't pay a lump sum or round up payments. All of these could lead to potential implications, such as:

- Being seen as income - affecting tax and/or benefit entitlements.
- Putting the organisation at risk of creating a contract with the volunteer - bringing them under employment legislation, including the right to the minimum wage, holiday pay etc.

You must be able to prove it is a reimbursement, which can be done by completing a simple form/petty cash slips accompanied with a receipt(s) and keeping in your records. To make it as easy as possible for volunteers to claim give all volunteers copies of/links to the expenses form at their induction – so they don't have to ask for it.

Where possible, cash may be easier as some volunteers may need the money on the day and not everyone has a bank account.

If you pay expenses in advance, any unspent must be returned or taken off a future expense claims - make sure there is clear process and policy for this. Some organisations purchase bus or train tickets themselves and give to volunteers in advance of when they are next due to volunteer which removes the need for a volunteer to put in a claim for travel expenses.

Mileage

HMRC allows volunteers to use the Approved Mileage Allowance Payment rate (AMAP). For more information and current rates visit [Gov.UK website](https://www.gov.uk)

Volunteering from home

HMRC has guidance on expenses for people working from home which can also be used for volunteering expenses. It covers phone call costs, and increased utility costs directly occurred due to their volunteer role (*not able to claim for things that the volunteer would have used if at home anyway, for example broadband, gas, electric*). As with all expenses, this will need to be shown in any audit. [Claim tax relief for your job expenses – working at home](#)

If volunteer choose not to claim

Remember everyone should be encouraged to claim expenses. If someone doesn't want to claim you can let them know that by doing so, they are also enabling the organisation to gain a true reflection of volunteer's costs for consideration in future budgeting and/or funding bids.

If they still don't want reimbursement, they may prefer to claim and donate their expenses back to the organisation. If volunteers are taxpayers, then gift aid may also be claimed.

If you can't reimburse expenses

If volunteering is key to the organisation it should be budgeted for within the organisations core costs. However, we do understand some organisations don't have funds for volunteer expenses - for example are all volunteers. This doesn't preclude you from involving volunteers, you just need to ensure you're upfront with any potential volunteers that this is the case.

Organisations can build expenses and other costs (support, recruitment, training etc) into future budgets and funding applications.

You can provide refreshments when on site/at team meetings/in supervisions and buy any resources/equipment/tools needed for the volunteering activities.

Expenses Policy

A clear and accessible policy should include:

- A statement of commitment to covering volunteer expenses and why
- What expenses will be reimbursed and any upper limits
- Instruction on how to claim and what documentation is required
- How and when payments will be made for example petty cash, BACS.
- A copy of the expenses claim form
- If applicable specific guidance for volunteer drivers

Further information available

[NCVO – Paying volunteer expenses](#)

[GOV.UK – Volunteering](#)

