



Volunteering Policy

Unique reference number: PP-VOL-P-002

Document Owner: Tracey Berridge, Head of Volunteering

Version: 3.0

Purpose of Policy

This policy outlines the key principles underlying Guide Dogs' approach to volunteering.

Volunteers are fundamental to Guide Dogs: without volunteers, we could not achieve our purpose, to help people with sight loss live the life they choose.

Our Guide Dogs volunteer community continues to expand and we're thankful for every one of our volunteers. We are committed to ensuring that volunteers have the best possible experience volunteering with us and that they are engaged, trained and managed effectively, and recognised for the impact and contribution they make.

The Volunteering Policy applies to all volunteers (including Trustees) and all staff who interact with, and manage volunteers. It does not cover internships, work experience, work placements, expert panels or focus groups (e.g. [Viewpoint](#) participants), [Guide Dogs Association Members](#), or third-party fundraisers raising money 'in aid of' Guide Dogs.

Definitions:

- **Casual volunteering** - Specific volunteering activities that are short-term, low risk, need minimal pre-existing skills and have no expectation of ongoing commitment. (Currently facilitated through **occasional volunteers**)
- **Corporate volunteer** - A volunteer who gives their time in a voluntary capacity with the support or encouragement of their employer.
- **Current volunteer** - A volunteer who has passed all stages of the recruitment process to perform a specified volunteer role at Guide Dogs.
- **Former volunteer** - A person who passed all stages of the recruitment process and was previously a current volunteer but who has since ceased a specified volunteer role.

- **Former volunteer applicant** - A person who previously applied for a specified volunteer role but did not complete all stages of the recruitment process to become a current volunteer.
- **Lead volunteer** - A volunteer performing a volunteer role that has some level of responsibility for supporting or managing other volunteers.
- **Micro volunteering** - Volunteering activities that involve people giving time through short, specific activities that are quick to start and complete, involve no commitment to repeat and have minimum formality.
- **Recruiting manager** - The named staff member, lead volunteer or designated team who has responsibility for key aspects of the 'Recruitment' stage of the volunteer journey including review of applications, conducting pre-screen & interviews, and making the selection decision.
- **Regular volunteering** - Volunteering activities that involve an ongoing commitment of time which is facilitated through the creation of a volunteer role and recruitment through our standard process.
- **Role owner** - The nominated individual staff member who is accountable for certain aspects of how a volunteer role works at Guide Dogs (see [role owner agreement](#))
- **Specialist volunteer** - A volunteer for whom a bespoke role has been created to specifically enable their involvement. Usually volunteers with specialised knowledge or skills providing Guide Dogs with pro-bono support.
- **Volunteer** - A person who gives their time to support Guide Dogs in a voluntary capacity and is not financially compensated for doing so, other than through the reimbursement of their expenses.
- **Volunteer applicant** - A person who has applied for a specified volunteer role but has not yet passed all stages of the recruitment process.
- **Volunteer journey** - The end-to-end lifecycle of volunteer involvement which Guide Dogs defines as seven distinct stages: Planning and Preparing; Attracting; Recruiting; Inducting and Training; Supporting and Managing; Engaging and Recognising; Leaving (see [Our Volunteer Journey](#))
- **Volunteer manager** - A named staff member or lead volunteer who has responsibility for managing a named volunteer in a specified volunteer role.

Policy Statements

General statements

Guide Dogs recognises that volunteers are an integral part of our organisation whose contribution is fundamental to achieving our mission and strategic aims. We

encourage the involvement of volunteers in any area of our work where it will benefit the organisation, the people with a visual impairment we support and volunteers themselves.

Guide Dogs aspires to be a sector-leading volunteer involving organisation and commits to working towards and achieving the [‘Investing in Volunteers’](#) quality standard.

Guide Dogs will ensure that staff are clear about the role of volunteers, the unique contribution they can make, the value they bring to our work, and commits to build a volunteer-positive culture that fosters excellent working relationships between staff and volunteers.

The contribution that volunteers make at Guide Dogs complements and expands the reach and capacity of paid staff. Volunteers must never be used to replace staff.

Guide Dogs must avoid the creation of legally binding relationships with volunteers (whether written or verbal) in relation to their volunteering. All volunteer-related documentation must make it clear that there is no intention to create a legally binding contract between Guide Dogs and the volunteer either now or at any time in the future.

Volunteering must always remain voluntary and freely entered into. Volunteers must never be placed under a formal or implied obligation to give their time and must be free to withdraw from volunteering at any time.

We recognise that Guide Dogs staff often also wish to volunteer for Guide Dogs. It must always be clear that when staff are volunteering, their relationship with us is truly a voluntary one, governed by the same processes as all Guide Dogs volunteers. Guide Dogs must not use ‘volunteering’ as a means of extending the agreed working hours for paid staff.

We recognise that there are costs associated with involving volunteers and we must ensure sufficient financial and staffing resources are available for the effective management and support of volunteers.

Guide Dogs commits to respect volunteers’ personal data and abide by all statutory requirements including the UK General Data Protection Regulations and the Data Protection Act 2018. We will be transparent about how volunteers’ data is processed through publication of a Volunteer Privacy Policy on our website. Volunteers’ personal data will be retained in line with the Data Retention Policy.

Guide Dogs is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all those who come into contact with the charity in accordance with legislation including the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and will take all reasonable steps to prevent harm. We commit to providing Public Liability insurance and Personal Accident insurance cover for all eligible regular and casual volunteers.

Guide Dogs is committed to Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all its beneficiaries, and we expect all volunteers to share this commitment. We commit to embedding Safeguarding to promote the wellbeing of all those who come into contact with the organisation and protect them from harm.

Guide Dogs defines the volunteer journey as consisting of seven stages: Planning and Preparing; Attracting; Recruiting; Inducting and Training; Supporting and Managing; Engaging and Recognising; and Leaving.

Planning and preparing for volunteers

Guide Dogs is working towards becoming a 'gold-standard' organisation for volunteers who are vision impaired and we must always ensure that our built and digital environments, our processes and culture are as inclusive and accessible as possible.

Guide Dogs acknowledges the importance of good planning in the effective involvement of volunteers, particularly where volunteering involves a regular commitment of time.

The Volunteering Team is accountable for the governance of all types of volunteer involvement at Guide Dogs, including the creation, review and management of regular volunteer roles, specialist volunteering, casual/occasional volunteering and micro volunteering. All forms of volunteer involvement must be co-created with and approved by the Volunteering Team and should be reviewed on a regular basis.

Some regular volunteer roles at Guide Dogs will have minimum age restrictions to ensure the appropriate management of risk, but we have no maximum age limit.

Guide Dogs recognises the value of involving volunteers in low-commitment casual and micro volunteering activities and acknowledges that such activities should be managed in a proportionate manner.

We recognise that individuals with valuable skills often approach Guide Dogs offering their support in a voluntary or pro-bono capacity and we may create bespoke specialist volunteer roles where this aligns with genuine business need. Similarly, we recognise that engaging corporate volunteers from external

organisations can deepen corporate relationships and we should consider any offers of support that align with genuine business need.

To ensure the organisation is well prepared to engage volunteers and to enable the effective planning of volunteer attraction, the need for volunteer recruitment should be forecast well in advance.

Attracting volunteers

Guide Dogs is committed to encouraging a diverse range of people to volunteer, including those from minoritised groups such as young people, people with vision impairment and other disabilities, people who identify as LGBTQIA+, and people from minority ethnic backgrounds. We are working hard to ensure that our marketing material is representative of the diversity of UK society, and that it speaks to the people we are trying to reach, while rejecting tokenism and the promotion of inclusion without the inclusive practices to follow it up.

To ensure charitable funds are used efficiently, we should attract volunteers in a cost-effective manner through targeted and data-driven marketing campaigns utilising the most appropriate advertising channels. All materials and campaigns must follow Guide Dogs brand guidelines.

We commit to adhering to all relevant statutory and Fundraising Regulator guidance in the marketing of volunteering opportunities, such as the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations, Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations and Business Protection from Misleading Marketing Regulations.

Recruiting volunteers

To protect and safeguard everyone at Guide Dogs, we commit to follow a robust set of recruitment practices including criminal disclosure checks, character references and identity verification.

To ensure we recruit the right people to the right roles, all regular volunteers must undergo a thorough selection process including an application, pre-screen, interview and the provision of satisfactory references.

We commit to providing a robust and effective recruitment journey for our staff and volunteers, using a safe, common-sense approach to onboarding our volunteers smoothly.

Guide Dogs pledges to treat all volunteer applicants fairly and will ensure our recruitment process is transparent, non-discriminatory, as free from bias as possible, and supportive of diverse individual needs.

Inducting and training volunteers

To ensure our volunteers have the best possible start and feel well equipped to begin their journey, we commit to providing volunteers with a high-quality induction to volunteering with us and their specific volunteer role, as well as to warmly introduce them to Guide Dogs and our volunteering community.

Guide Dogs pledges to make clear the expectations we have of volunteers and what volunteers can expect of Guide Dogs throughout their time as a volunteer.

We commit to providing volunteers with appropriate training to equip them to perform their roles effectively and with confidence. Some training will be mandatory before voluntary activity can commence, some mandatory within the settling in period, and some training will be optional. Volunteers will be required to refresh some types of training on a periodic basis to continue volunteering in certain roles.

Supporting and managing volunteers

All regular volunteers must go through a settling in period after they begin activity in a volunteer role which allows the volunteer to experience the role and their volunteer manager confirm their suitability for the role.

Guide Dogs pledges to support volunteers to perform their role effectively. Volunteers must always be aware of where they can access support and who they can turn to in case of problems. We commit to providing all regular volunteers with a named volunteer manager for each of their volunteer roles and a named local contact in the Volunteering Team.

Guide Dogs believes that volunteers should not be out of pocket as a result of their voluntary activity and commits to reimburse any reasonable pre-agreed expenses incurred. Where it is more cost effective to reimburse volunteers via a flat-rate reimbursement, such reimbursements must always be based on a reasonable pre-estimate of actual expenses incurred.

We recognise that problems and concerns can arise in the course of volunteering, both from a volunteer's perspective and those working with a volunteer. Guide Dogs commits to resolving problems and concerns in a fair and timely manner. We commit to regularly reviewing volunteer complaints and feeding insights gained into continuous improvement.

We acknowledge that when volunteers' personal circumstances change they may wish to temporarily take a break from volunteering, which we will accommodate wherever possible.

Engaging and recognising volunteers

Guide Dogs acknowledges that ensuring volunteers feel connected to our organisation and its mission, and ensuring volunteers understand the impact of their voluntary contribution are important factors in volunteer satisfaction and retention.

We want all volunteers to feel like they belong whatever their background and must strive to foster an inclusive culture where although people may not share life experiences, they are always respectful of the journeys of others.

Guide Dogs should always strive to provide volunteers with tailored communications that satisfy both the needs of the organisation and individual volunteer preferences around format and frequency.

We acknowledge the importance of recognising the collective contribution of our volunteer community and the contribution of individual volunteers, and commit to doing so in a variety of ways at a national and local level. We must ensure that all forms of recognition are proportionate and equitable across all volunteer roles.

Guide Dogs acknowledges that individual preferences around being recognised for volunteering contributions vary, and that receiving thanks verbally or in writing is often the most effective form of recognition. Volunteers should be able to opt-out of certain forms of formal recognition if they so choose.

To avoid acts of recognition being misconstrued as ‘consideration’ for services received, any recognition or award for volunteers should be termed and treated as being discretionary, low in financial value, not provided as of right, and should not place volunteers under obligation.

Guide Dogs recognises the importance of providing volunteers with opportunities to express their views and ideas, and to be involved in relevant decision making.

Leaving volunteers

Guide Dogs recognises that leaving is an important part of the volunteer journey. When the time comes for a volunteer to cease volunteering, for whatever reason, we commit to recognising their contribution, gathering feedback about their experience, and using it to inform our continuous improvement.

Outgoing volunteers should always be made aware of other opportunities to engage with and remain a warm supporter of Guide Dogs.

References

Sources used in the development of the Volunteering Policy include:

- [Investing in Volunteers](#) standards
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations, Time Well Spent reports ([2019](#), [2023](#))
- Fundraising Regulator's [Code of Fundraising Practice](#)

Documentation:

None identified.

Permissible exceptions:

Any exceptions to the Volunteering Policy must be agreed by the Head of Volunteering.

Related Policies or Processes:

Internal stakeholders and volunteer managers are encouraged to refer to the [Volunteer Manager Hub](#) for further information on volunteering processes and procedures, and resources to support all aspects of managing volunteers at Guide Dogs.

All volunteering policies, processes, procedures and quality standards are overseen by the [Volunteering Framework function](#) who very much welcome feedback and suggestions for improvement. Throughout 2023 and 2024 we will be developing our seven core volunteer processes that will align with the seven stages of the [volunteer journey](#), each of which will have multiple supporting procedures and quality standards.

- Volunteer Planning Process
- Volunteer Attraction Process
- Volunteer Recruitment Process
- Volunteer Induction and Training Process
- Volunteer Support and Management Process
- Volunteer Engagement and Recognition Process
- Volunteer Leaving Process

Governance Review & Approval Table**:

The table below contains two rows and five columns.

	H&S	Protection of Children & Adults	Insurance	Legal
Date Reviewed	16/08/23	04/09/23	23/08/23	16/08/23

Review Frequency:

The Volunteering Policy will be formally reviewed every 2 years.

Version control table:

The table below contains four rows and four columns. (Only the original approval date and the most recent amendment should be included in the table.)

Date	Version	Status	Details of Change
04/09/23	3.0	Updated	Full review and rewrite.
18/09/20	2.0	Updated	Reviewed, updated to align with Safeguarding Audit recommendations, transferred to new template

**** Please see below when a document must be reviewed by governance**

Safeguarding - All documents with any reference to safeguarding, recruitment and training, working with clients (Adult and CYP)

Legal - All documents with any reference to agreements or contracts, third party partnerships, potential reputational risk, reference to compliance with any statutory or regulatory obligation

Health and Safety - All documents where an activity could cause harm to a member of staff, service user, volunteer or third party or where there is reputational risk

Insurance - A change to the way we deliver our services

End of document