

Sending Volunteers Overseas

CHECKLIST

A good practice checklist for organisations sending volunteers overseas

Many organisations send volunteers abroad every year. Some of these placements are for a few weeks and some for a number of months. The Volunteer Development Agency has worked with a number of local organisations to develop this checklist of good volunteering practice in sending volunteers abroad.

Planning for Volunteer involvement

- Your organisation should have a written policy that sets out the organisation's values for volunteer involvement and highlights the need for procedures for managing volunteers, based on principles of equality and diversity. For example, a Code of Practice and a Volunteer Charter for volunteers going overseas should be produced by the organisation. For more information see: [http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what we do/publications/](http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what_we_do/publications/)
- A key person or group of people within the organisation should be responsible for recruiting, selecting, supporting and protecting volunteers, and there is a clear line of responsibility and management.
- An assessment of potential risk to volunteers should be conducted when designing volunteer roles. The Health and Safety Executive considers it good practice for a volunteer involving organisation to provide the same level of health and safety protection as they would in an employer/employee relationship, irrespective of whether there are strict legal duties. Please see: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/faqs/charities.htm> for more information on risk assessment, moving and handling, first aid etc. The use of specific equipment in building projects etc while abroad may also require specific health and safety provisions and equipment. There is no doubt that there are significant differences in respect of Health and Safety practice across the world however organisations owe volunteers a duty of care regardless of where their volunteering takes them.

Recruitment and Selection

- Information about the organisation and ways in which volunteers can be involved overseas is made as widely available as possible. This helps to ensure diversity in the volunteers coming forward for the role.
- A 'description' is drawn up for each volunteer role which includes, location and information about the skills and personal attributes required for the role. This is even more important than in a locally based volunteering role because there is no opportunity for individual to visit the project before they commence. The role description needs to give a full and realistic picture of the role. For more information see the Recruiting

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Volunteers Toolkit: [http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what we do/publications/](http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what_we_do/publications/)

- People interested in volunteering are provided with clear and realistic information about the opportunities, the recruitment and selection procedure, what volunteers can expect from the organisation, and what the organisation's expectations are.
- Volunteers are informed if their application is unsuccessful and are offered feedback and are signposted to other organisations as appropriate.
- The organisation's approach to the use of official checks takes into account the relevant Government guidelines, and the roles in which volunteers will be placed.

The most recent guidance received from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is that if volunteers are recruited in Northern Ireland to work on placements abroad, in posts that would be defined as regulated under Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups, then as part of their recruitment process an Enhanced Disclosure Check should be carried out. However they would not be required to be registered with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). However, if the individual was to come back to work in regulated activity in England, Wales or NI at that point he/she should be ISA registered. For more information on ISA and good practice in child protection: [http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what we do/child protection/](http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what_we_do/child_protection/). For more information on AccessNI see: <http://www.accessni.gov.uk/>

Information, Training and Support

i. Pre-departure:

- Volunteers are provided with the necessary information and/or training to carry out their role. They should also be encouraged to think about the impact their time overseas will have on them and how they can adapt to the culture in the country they will be staying in.

Other information which would be relevant to include in an induction session and followed up with training materials would be adapting to a new culture, orientation, personal safety, health and access to medical facilities, organisational policy including complaints procedure for volunteers and how the organisation will address situations where the volunteer has behaved inappropriately. Volunteers should be provided with written guidelines on crisis management (including medical emergencies, security risks, natural disasters etc). Volunteers' next of kin should also be provided with contact details to use in an emergency.

There may also be role specific training required e.g. use of particular equipment or child protection training. Training on adapting working skills may be required depending on the task and the skill level of the volunteers.

Where team Leaders are volunteers they will need specific training and support and

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the role description and person specification for team leaders will differ from that of team members. Some organisations may choose to require volunteers to have participated in at least one team as a member before becoming a team leader.

- The organisation's Code of Practice and/or Volunteer Charter should be provided and explained to volunteers at an induction meeting. It should cover things such as expected behaviour, relationships with other team members, relationships with people in the country, giving gifts, learning about the country etc. An example of the kind of information to be considered in relation to preparation for volunteers is to be found at: <http://www.comhlamh.org/resources-library.html>. There you can find a Volunteer Charter and a Code of Good Practice for Sending Organisations which provide useful background reading.
- Volunteers should be informed about details of embassies or consulates as relevant in the areas being visited. Please see below for details provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA).
FCO: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/embassies-and-posts/find-an-embassy-overseas/>
DFA: <http://www.dfa.ie/home/index.aspx?id=275>

The FCO and DFA are also useful points of information regarding entry requirements and travel advice for other countries and again this information should be given to volunteers.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) offer a service called LOCATE this allows volunteers to register the details of their trip with the FCO so that in the event of an emergency it is easier to contact individuals. For more information see <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/Locate/>

International Driving Permits are also available and may be necessary if volunteers are driving as part of their role in some countries. For more information please see: <http://www.postoffice.co.uk/portal/po/jump2?catId=19100187&mediaId=19100195>

- Volunteers are covered by appropriate insurance

Insurance cover for things such as emergency medical and dental expenses, travel expenses, personal accident, personal liability, personal property and business equipment should be considered. It is important to seek professional advice in relation to finding the appropriate insurance for more information on finding an appropriate insurance company see: <http://www.biba.org.uk/ConsumerHome.aspx>
- There is a clear policy on the reimbursement of volunteers' out of pocket expenses and where volunteers are asked to contribute to the costs of their travel or to fundraise specifically for the project then this is clearly outlined in any publicity material.

- Organisations should seek appropriate personal contact and medical information and this should be protected in line with Data Protection principles.

Medical information is a necessary part of the application process for volunteering overseas and it is advisable for volunteers to visit their GP before they travel to seek advice about vaccination. In some circumstances organisations may seek confirmation from a GP that a volunteer is fit to travel. Further guidance on vaccinations for volunteers travelling abroad is available from:

<http://www.masta-travel-health.com/masta-health-brief.aspx>

ii. Overseas:

- Volunteers should have some form of on-arrival induction and/or orientation by the local organisation or contact. This could include local knowledge, information on cultural differences, language skills, local economic/political profile, banking system, introduction to staff, personal safety, what to do in an emergency etc. It may also be useful to issue them with a small credit sized card with emergency contact information on it so they have it readily available.
- Volunteers should have clear guidelines on who is responsible for what, and where their own responsibilities lie within the local team.
- Volunteers should have the opportunity to review and evaluate their experiences at regular intervals both formally and informally.

iii. Return

- The organisation should endeavour to obtain feedback from volunteers when they return from abroad, ideally this should be done face to face in a debrief session. This will help to see if the service provided to volunteers has been effective and whether they enjoyed their volunteering experience. It may also assist organisations to identify individuals who may need additional support to deal with issues raised by their time abroad.
- Volunteers' and organisations' evaluations should form part of future planning of projects to improve conditions and maintain quality standards for all partners involved.
- Management Committee/Trustees and paid staff should recognise the value of volunteers' contributions and communicate effectively their appreciation to volunteers, both formally and informally.

Other Useful Resources

'People in Aid' is a global network of development and aid organisations. They provide an

extensive range of resources for HR staff involved in recruiting and supporting staff undertaking overseas work, some of which are available free and relevant for volunteers. Please see <http://www.peopleinaid.org/resources/default.aspx>

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Disclaimer

Reasonable precautions have been taken to ensure information in this publication is accurate. However it is not intended to be legally comprehensive; it is designed to provide guidance in good faith without accepting liability. If relevant, we therefore recommend you take appropriate professional advice before taking any action on the matters covered herein. Charity (Inland Revenue) No. XO115/92. Company Limited by Guarantee No. NI26680. Registered in Northern Ireland.