

SECTION 4

Volunteer policies and procedures



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Access NI

EBCDA is registered as an umbrella body with AccessNI, the criminal history disclosure service in Northern Ireland. By law, some employers must check criminal history before they recruit. When asked by these employers, AccessNI supplies criminal history information about job applicants, volunteers and employees. A criminal history check is also known as a disclosure. AccessNI searches the details against UK criminal records and police information and these searches may disclose any criminal history to certain employers and organisations. AccessNI produces a disclosure certificate for every check.

An AccessNI check provides three different levels of information about an individual:

1. A basic check contains details of all convictions considered to be unspent, or states that no convictions were found
2. A standard check contains details of all spent and unspent convictions and relevant cautions
3. An enhanced check contains the same information as a standard check as well as a check of police records held locally, and for positions working with children and vulnerable adults, may include information held by the Disclosure and Barring Service. Enhanced checks are normally required when the applicant will work or volunteer in a role providing services to, or having close and regular supervision of children and / or vulnerable adults.

An umbrella body is an Access NI-registered body which submits standard and enhanced criminal record checks for employers and organisations.

Access NI authorises umbrella bodies to provide these services to organisations. EBCDA can currently submit standard and enhanced checks for volunteers within community organisations based in East Belfast only. There is no charge for this service.

1. Access NI PIN and ID validation form: This form should first be given to the volunteer as it sets out the step-by-step process of registering with Access NI and applying online. This form should then be returned to the organisation along with the relevant ID documents so it can be signed by a nominated contact to verify the identity of the applicant.
2. Application for Disclosure Cover Sheet: This form asks for more details about the volunteer and the volunteer position. It should be completed by a nominated contact within the organisation. This information is needed by EBCDA to complete the process.

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The volunteer's disclosure certificate is valid during the recruitment process for a specific role. Information about the criminal record history is accurate on the day the certificate was issued. A disclosure certificate should not be transferred from one role to another.

More information about developing an Equal Opportunities and Diversity Statement for your organisation can be found at: www.volunteernow.co.uk/app/uploads/2021/06/AccessNI-What-you-need-to-know.pdf

Volunteers and the Law

Normally, volunteers have very few legal rights, unlike paid staff who have a wealth of protection under employment legislation. Some organisations unknowingly create contracts of employment (written or unwritten) in the way they engage with volunteers, which may make it possible for volunteers to pursue legal action against the organisation. However, it is important to note that most volunteer/organisational relationships end amicably, and it does not mean that all your policies and procedures need to be rewritten. The emphasis is on your working practices and these should be reviewed to make sure they fall outside a contractual relationship.

Practical ways to minimise the risk of a contract situation:

1. Do what you can to make sure that volunteers are treated fairly and have access to good procedures for settling disputes
2. Make it clear that the roles of volunteers are voluntary, i.e. unpaid
3. Reduce the formality of your documents and review the language you use. Avoid using legal or employment jargon like, 'work', 'contract' or 'job descriptions'
4. Recognise that you can't require volunteers to provide a service in return for training
5. Don't pay flat rate expenses or anything more than out-of-pocket expenses – the occasional thank you such as a party or social outing is fine

More information about volunteers and the law for your organisation can be found at this link www.volunteernow.co.uk/app/uploads/2020/11/Volunteers-The-Law-Information-Sheet-2020.pdf

Volunteering and Benefits

A good rule of thumb is that volunteering will not affect a person's entitlement to benefits if they are only receiving the reimbursement of genuine out-of-pocket expenses. There is also no limit to the number of hours a person can volunteer when they are receiving benefits, if they are still deemed to be available for interviews or work should Social Security or the Jobs and Benefits Office wish to contact them.

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Volunteers who receive benefits should talk to their local Social Security Office before they begin volunteering to find out exactly what impact volunteering will have on their benefits, as each individual case will be different. Organisations working with volunteers have no duty to inform their local Social Security Office about who is volunteering for them.

However, organisations should help to ensure that volunteers have the necessary information and that they have written documentation about their volunteering.

Further information about living with benefits can be gained from www.ebiac.org

Volunteer Expenses

Although people give their time freely, they should not be out of pocket through their volunteering. However, no more than out-of-pocket expenses should be paid. It is good practice to reimburse volunteers for the expenses they incur as a result of volunteering for your organisation.

Tips for volunteer expenses:

1. All volunteers should be reimbursed genuine out-of-pocket expenses i.e. the exact amount volunteers have spent during their volunteering
2. A simple and brief claim form should be drawn up detailing the expenses. Where possible, get volunteers to attach receipts to their claim form
3. It may be helpful to keep expenses claims sensible by establishing upper limits on things like lunch. For example if the upper limit for lunch is £5 this means that volunteers should be reimbursed the exact amount, they have spent on lunch, but it should be no more than £5
4. It is important that volunteers know the process of how to claim expenses and that they are reimbursed quickly

If you can't afford volunteer expenses now, cost them into future funding applications, or consider applying for a small grant specifically to cover expenses. You may not have enough money to cover travel, but are you able to reimburse volunteers for phone calls, stationery etc., or are you able to supply snacks or lunch during volunteer shifts? Alternatively, look at the, 'Volunteer Recognition' section for ideas on giving back to your volunteers even if you are working on a shoestring.

You should always be careful about payments to volunteers who are receiving Social Security benefits.

You can access further information about volunteer expenses at this link www.volunteernow.co.uk/app/uploads/2021/06/Volunteers-Expenses-Information-Sheet-.pdf

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Equal Opportunities and Diversity

An organisation's volunteer policy will include their values on involving volunteers so will naturally also include having a diverse volunteer team. Although volunteers themselves are not covered by equal opportunities employment legislation, it is in your organisation's interest to take equal opportunities and diversity seriously.

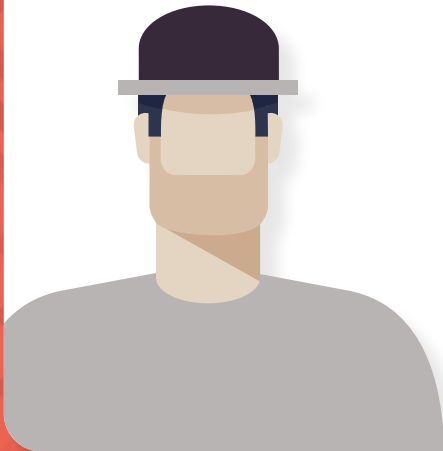
Equality is about making sure that people are given equal access to opportunities and resources. Equality is not about treating everyone in the same way; it is about treating everyone fairly, with respect and recognising that people from different backgrounds may have needs that are met in different ways.

Diversity is about valuing individual difference. Diversity challenges us to recognise and value all sorts of differences that exist when people work together, in order to build stronger communities and harmonious environments for the benefit of all.

People come from a wide variety of backgrounds and we can be different from one another in many ways. These can include differences that are highlighted in current equality legislation such as race, religion and sex but also include things like our personality, personal interests and lifestyle choices, such as being a vegetarian or a smoker.

It is good practice to produce an Equal Opportunities and Diversity Statement which is displayed clearly in your organisation and on recruitment materials where appropriate. Promoting equality and diversity should become second nature to your organisation, and although the monitoring of equality and diversity is not law, it will help your organisation if you are able to provide your funders with a snapshot of your volunteer team's diversity.

More information about developing an Equal Opportunities and Diversity Statement for your organisation can be found at both links below
www.volunteernow.co.uk/app/uploads/2021/05/Diversity-in-Volunteering-Information-Sheet-1.pdf
www.volunteernow.co.uk/app/uploads/2018/10/As-Good-As-They-Give-Workbook-5-Volunteers-and-the-Wider-Organisation.pdf



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Monitoring, Evaluation and Measuring Impact

It is good practice to be aware of how involving volunteers in your organisation is working. It's useful to demonstrate the impact that volunteers have on your organisation, both in terms of their contribution and their economic value and to identify areas in your volunteer programme that may need improvement. Your funders may require evidence of monitoring and evaluation in your volunteer programme.

A four step guide to monitoring and evaluation:

1. Planning – what to evaluate, how to measure it, what information is required and how to collect it
2. Monitoring – collecting and recording the information
3. Evaluating – analysing data, interpreting results
4. Making improvements – identifying and prioritising improvements, planning and implementing action, monitoring and evaluating work

The following tools can also be accessed for further guidance:

1. Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit (VIAT). This toolkit can be used by anyone who involves volunteers in their organisation or coordinates their activities and helps organisations assess the difference that volunteering makes. As well as the printed handbook with step-by-step guidance on how to assess the impact of volunteering, you will also have access to a range of tools and templates in a free downloadable resource pack.

Volunteer Now offer full training on the use of the toolkit, though there is a cost associated with this. You can access information at this link. www.volunteernow.co.uk/organisations/involving-volunteers/impact-assessments

2. Investing in Volunteers (IiV). This is the UK quality standard for good practice in volunteer management. If you would like to benchmark the quality of your volunteer management and involvement, improve the effectiveness of your work with volunteers and enhance your organisation's reputation, Investing in Volunteers is the ideal quality standard for you. Your organisation can apply for the Investing in Volunteers accreditation by accessing the link below and following the process, there is a cost associated with this. This is managed by Volunteer Now here in Northern Ireland investinginvolunteers.co.uk
3. National Occupational Standards (NOS) for the Management of Volunteers. A comprehensive definition of the whole spectrum of activities required to achieve the development and implementation of the volunteering strategy within an organisation effectively. They have been designed primarily for those working in the voluntary and community sector. www.volunteernow.co.uk/app/uploads/2018/10/National-Occupational-Standards-for-Volunteer-Managers.pdf