

HOW TO MANAGE VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are the life-blood, heartbeat, energy and enthusiasm of any Community Tree Nursery and it's important that you keep them happy while ensuring their work advances the aims of the nursery.



The glasshouse at Bath Hub tree nursery is a hive of activity

STEP ONE PLANNING

Before you start advertising for volunteers for your community nursery, it's important to consider how volunteering will work at the nursery, what you want from volunteers and what you can offer them.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What exactly do you need volunteers to help with? A volunteer role promoting the nursery involves a different skillset to that needed to sow seeds and plant trees. You might also want some people to take on more responsibility, for example, in leading other volunteers.
- How will volunteering operate? For example, can volunteers drop into the nursery at any

time or are there set times? Do they need to sign up in advance? Will people be able to use nearby facilities, such as a kitchen or toilet?

- How will volunteers communicate and coordinate with each other? There are many options – via email or WhatsApp, in person at meetings, or perhaps on a noticeboard at the nursery. Remember to be inclusive. Does everyone have a smart phone and access to certain apps, for example?
- How involved do you want volunteers to be with making decisions about managing the nursery? If you would appreciate their input, how will you engage them with this and manage a fair and inclusive process? How will decisions be made?



One of the volunteer teams at Tree Musketeers, Hackney

STEP TWO RECRUITING

Think carefully about the recruitment process for new volunteers. Do you want them to fill in an application form or provide references? Will you interview them? The answers are likely to depend on how much responsibility comes with each role, and how your nursery operates.

Volunteer role descriptions

It is helpful to have a volunteer role description to send to anyone who is interested in volunteering that makes it clear what each role involves. This could include:

- Main activities and responsibilities of the role
- Where and when the work will take place, and what level of commitment is needed
- How the volunteer's work will fit in with the tree nursery or wider project
- What the benefits are for the volunteer
- Whether equipment will be supplied or they need to provide their own (this includes PPE)
- Any particular skills or knowledge that are required or helpful for the role

- Who to contact about volunteering and instructions on how to apply.

Volunteer policy and agreements

A volunteer policy can help to define the role volunteers play in the nursery, and ensure everyone is treated equally and fairly. There are lots of examples of policies available online, and your local volunteer centre can also help you to develop a policy.

Volunteer agreements can be used to set out both a nursery's commitment to its volunteers and what it hopes for from its volunteers. Even if you decide not to create a formal agreement before you recruit, it's worth considering the various elements. These include:

What you will offer volunteers

- How you'll induct new volunteers and provide any training necessary
- How you'll support volunteers in their role
- If you'll reimburse volunteers' expenses

- If volunteers will be covered by the nursery's insurance.

What you will expect from volunteers

- That they will follow relevant policies and procedures, such as health and safety
- That they will fulfil expectations of the role, such as how long they volunteer for, how much time they commit, and complete any training required
- Any values or behaviours you'd expect volunteers to adopt

► Focus on the individual and create an environment where they can express themselves.

STEP THREE FINDING PEOPLE

Think about the benefits of volunteering in the nursery and what might excite and attract different groups of people – they might not be the same things that motivate you. They could be health and wellbeing, learning and experience, making friends and socialising, or relate to the project's environmental impacts.

Raise awareness

Try different methods of recruiting in order to reach different groups. For example:

- Social media – for example, local or special interest groups on Facebook
- Websites
- Newsletters
- Posters and leaflets
- Local organisations and networks
- Local press
- Hold an open day, tree-planting session or other event where people can learn more about the nursery and volunteering
- Run a stand at a local event



A volunteer at Bath Mind

- Find your local volunteer centre, they can often list volunteer roles: [Find a volunteer centre - Google My Maps](#)
- Ask existing volunteers to bring their friends and family along.

Offer inductions

Make time to meet new volunteers to introduce them to their roles and find out more about them. This could be a meeting just before or after a regular volunteer session at the nursery.

A volunteer induction might include:

- Going through the volunteer agreement and policy and explaining what they mean
- Advising on health and safety information
- Finding out contact details for next of kin
- Taking a tour of the site
- Explaining how they will be supported and introducing them to other volunteers
- Talking and discovering what motivates the volunteer, and any concerns or things that might affect their volunteering.



Celebrating the first-year anniversary of the nursery with a bring-and-share in the polytunnel at Gressenhall nursery

STEP FOUR MANAGING AND RETAINING PEOPLE

Managing your volunteers effectively and providing them with adequate support will help them to stay interested and motivated, and help you to retain them. Take time to get to know them, understand what they find satisfying about volunteering and listen to any concerns they may have about their role or the group.

Volunteers are more likely to perform well in their roles and continue volunteering if they:

- Are adequately supported and supervised. Think about how to supply this support in the nursery. Printed guides may be helpful for some tasks. Would a buddy system for new volunteers be helpful?
- Feel appreciated. A simple thank you can go a long way to making someone feel valued!

- Feel they are doing something worthwhile and making a difference. Make sure you take time out to celebrate nursery achievements together as a team.
- Have opportunities for learning and developing skills. Are you able to offer some training, or arrange a visit to other nurseries?
- Feel confident that they can handle the tasks they are asked to do. Make sure you provide training, guidance and support where needed.
- Have a sense of belonging. It's important that everyone is recognised for the role they play in the team and included socially – try to have regular tea breaks together as a group.
- Are consulted about their work. Make sure volunteers have the opportunity to contribute to decisions that affect their roles.

HEALTH AND SAFETY, INSURANCE AND THE LAW

Health and safety

It's important to consider the health and safety of volunteers and have a risk assessment in place. You can find Guidance for employers on voluntary work here: www.hse.gov.uk/voluntary/employer/index.htm If volunteers are expected to work on their own, you might also need particular lone working arrangements.

Safeguarding and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

Where the volunteering role involves working with, or the opportunity for contact with children, young people or vulnerable adults, then you need to consider how you will ensure safeguarding and whether you need Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has more information on safeguarding here: www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/safeguarding/getting-started-with-safeguarding/what-is-safeguarding

Data protection

How and where will you store volunteers' data? You'll need to make sure you only collect the data you need and keep records up to date.

The NCVO has more information here: www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/volunteers-and-the-law/volunteers-and-employment-rights/data-protection-and-volunteers/#/the-data-protection-principles

Dealing with problems

The NCVO has information on dealing with problems with volunteers here: www.ncvo.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/if-volunteering-goes-wrong It's also worth reading about volunteers and the law www.ncvo.org.uk/

[help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/volunteers-and-the-law](http://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/volunteers-and-the-law)

Insurance

Whether you need insurance, and what type, will depend on how you are operating. There are two main types to consider.

■ Employer's liability insurance

There is no duty to insure volunteers, but it may be advisable for organisations to have this cover in case negligence cases are brought by volunteers. NCVO advises: "Organisations should make sure that volunteers are covered by their employers' liability insurance or under similar terms in their public liability policy."

For more guidance, visit: www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/volunteers-and-the-law/insurance-and-volunteers

■ Public liability insurance

This protects for claims by third parties caused by the negligence of the organisation. It may be possible to extend a policy, as mentioned above, to cover claims from volunteers arising from injury or sickness as a result of negligence by the organisation. You may also be able to extend it to protect against loss or damage to property caused through the negligence of someone acting for the organisation, which may include volunteers.

TCV (The Conservation Volunteers) have a community group network that offers access to discounted insurance for community groups. To find out more, visit www.tcv.org.uk/communities/join-community-network/community-group-insurance 🍏