

Volunteer Expenses

Volunteer Centre Greenwich—Members Factsheet

SHOULD YOU REIMBURSE VOLUNTEERS' EXPENSES?

For many volunteers, whether or not you can cover their travel expenses can be a deciding factor as to whether or not they volunteer with you.

If someone is out of work or on a low income they may simply not be able to afford to get to you. Reimbursing someone's expenses is important in showing that you support equal opportunities as you are not excluding people on low incomes by offering fair and equal reimbursement of expenses.

Some organisations also offer to reimburse expenses before they are incurred e.g. allowing a volunteer to claim their lunch allowance before lunch and allowing them to return after lunch with a receipt. This also happens with volunteers who are unable to pay their own travel expenses. As an organisation you should make it clear exactly how much a volunteer is able to claim for expenses.

Expenses: How much should you cover?

There are no rules as to how much you should cover with your volunteer expenses, although. Many organisations in London set travel expenses at the cost of a travel card and will not reimburse amounts that exceed this. How much you cover for lunch/meal expenses is also down to you with the amounts covered ranging from £3 to £5.

It is important to remember that some volunteers may be out of work and therefore will need reimbursing daily. It is always better to reimburse by cash rather than cheque as paying by cheque could be a barrier to volunteering for some people both due to the delay in the funds being available and the volunteer getting to the bank.

It is a good idea to set how much you should reimburse for someone's travel or lunch expenses, and when you will reimburse them in a Volunteer Policy or Expenses Policy. This will avoid confusion and abuse of your system.

Expenses: Legal issue tip

You should always reimburse actual expenses incurred, as giving lump sums could be seen as a payment, which could lead to legal problems, e.g. "Thank you for coming, here's £10 to cover your expenses" This is particularly true when involving volunteers whom are asylum seekers and refugees as it could lead to them being deported. You can give people expenses in advance BUT you must remember to collect their receipts

Other costs

It is important to remember and acknowledge that engaging volunteers into your organisation has certain cost elements other than reimbursing volunteers' travel or lunch costs. Other costs are often overlooked and include materials, equipment, celebration events during National Volunteers' Week (1-7 June every year) and staff time when managing volunteers.

If you are fundraising for your volunteer programme remember to include ALL the costs involved in volunteering, including the provision on volunteer expenses.

Expenses for childcare costs

Some organisation who have the budget will cover childcare costs and If volunteers incur costs for child-care in the course of their volunteering it is important to be clear about whether your organisation does or does not cover childcare costs. Childcare can be a barrier to people volunteering if you can cover childcare cost it will make your volunteering roles more inclusive.

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Choosing who should look after a child is a matter for parents and carers. Volunteer involving organisations that are reimbursing volunteer expenses have a responsibility to:

- Ensure the expenditure is legitimate.
- Encourage good practice in child protection.
- For these reasons it is preferable that children are looked after by a registered childminder or in a play-group registered with the local Health and Social Care Trust. This is because:
- All registered childminders and playgroups are required to implement a comprehensive series of quality standards designed to ensure children in their care are well looked after.
- A registered childminder or playgroup will be able to supply a volunteer with a receipt which volunteer involving organisations can use to verify expenditure.

However in some cases registered childminders may not be available or some parents or carers may choose to have their child looked after by an adult they would trust to look after their child in other circumstances.

This situation is less clear cut in terms of expenses and child protection. Child Protection Parents and carers are responsible for their child's welfare at all times. It is up to them to make informed decisions about the adults that they choose to look after their children. However organisations can help by providing information to parents on child protection issues. This can range from information on health and safety to information on how to identify signs of abuse.

Volunteers in receipt of Benefits:

All benefits whether it is Universal Credit, Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance will not be affected so long as only out of pocket expenses are reimbursed.

A volunteer being in receipt of benefits will not normally incur restrictions on the amount of hours they can volunteer, however ,they must fulfil the requirements of their benefit ,for example: if a volunteer is receiving Jobseekers Allowance they must be actively seeking work and available for job interviews as agreed with their Job Centre Plus Personal Advisor.

It is recommended that volunteers inform their Job Centre Plus Personal Advisors of their volunteering.

Volunteers, Expenses and the National Minimum Wage

The National Minimum Wage became law on 1st April 1999. It does not apply to volunteers who are receiving reimbursement of actual out of pocket expenses based on receipts provided. For further information, go to <http://www.gov.uk/volunteering/pay-and-expenses>