

Set 6

Resource Implications

Developing Volunteer Expenses Guidelines

What expenses should we be paying our volunteers?

Volunteers should not have to incur costs to volunteer for an organisation. It is good practice to offer to pay all volunteers out of pocket expenses for costs incurred while volunteering, otherwise some people will be prevented from volunteering.

Expenses should be paid for the following:

- Travel and costs of petrol used in the course of volunteering
- Meals (usually if volunteering for over a minimum agreed period)
- Postage and telephone costs in connection with volunteering
- Care of children (although not all organisations can do this – see below)
- Protective clothing or essential equipment

Organisations should only pay volunteers actual out of pocket expenses and not fixed amounts per session or lump sums. Paying more than actual out of pocket expenses can cause two main problems:

- Volunteers may be penalised by the Benefits Agency or be liable to taxation (see InfoSheet 2.9 on Volunteering and State Benefits)
- It increases the possibility of volunteers being classed as employees.

Developing expenses guidelines

Ensure that you are clear about the following:

How much you will pay volunteers for travel, childcare, postage, childcare, meals and essential equipment, stating your maximum limits.

That you have a clear process for volunteers when they come to claim their expenses. They should have a clear form to fill in and told how to claim, who to claim from and when. You should provide information to volunteers regarding receipts – it is important that volunteers provide proper receipts so that you can show that you are not paying them anything other than actual out-of-pocket expenses.

Make sure that your volunteers are clear about all processes in relation to claiming expenses, and make this part of your induction process (see InfoSheet 3.1) and your Volunteer Handbook (see InfoSheet 4.3).

Should we pay childcare expenses?

If you contact your local Childcare Information Service they should be able to give you some idea of the costs of different kinds of care in your area. As with other expenses you may well want to set some kind of limit. However you should bear in mind that volunteers will be caring for people with different levels of need and as with all expenses you will need to bear in mind individual circumstances before imposing a strict limit

Many organisations are still not in a position to be able to pay childcare or care expenses to volunteers. Few people allow for this expense when they apply for funding. Organisations often choose not to because they are afraid that it will make a volunteer expenses budget unattractively high for funders or that the extra money will not get spent if no volunteers come forward who need to claim it. There is a general issue with the way that funding is viewed, and the perceived need to put in the lowest possible budget and compensate for an underspend one year by lowering the budget the next. Many organisations choose to ignore the issue rather than attempting to tackle it. This is a shame as it means that parents with small children or people caring for an adult are excluded from. In an article in Edinburgh Volunteer Exchange's summer newsletter Mark Steven argues that people on low incomes with pre-school children should be viewed as a socially excluded group. Then some of the systems currently used in the field of Equal Opportunities should be used for measuring and securing their involvement. Generally a good performance indicator for Equal Opportunities would be to look at the percentage of a certain group within your community and see whether the percentage of that group within your workforce is similar. For organisations with a more specialised client group it may be better to look at percentages of different groups within the client group and try to work towards a staff/volunteer team that reflects this. Using this as a model, organisations could use the percentage of parents on low incomes within the community and/or client group to predict the percentage of volunteers who may potentially need to be reimbursed childcare costs if they are to be included. In this way budgeting for childcare costs would be less about guesswork and more about actively planning to involve a potentially excluded group.

This section is based on information from the Edinburgh Volunteer Exchange.