

Voluntary and Community Action

Volunteer Expenses

Volunteering Information Sheet No. 11

March 2009

Expenses are extremely important to volunteers. The reimbursement of expenses is an equal opportunities issue. The cost of travelling and a meal eaten out is significant to someone on benefits or a low income. Any organisation serious about involving a diverse range of volunteers should reimburse expenses. Volunteer expenses should be built into any funding application.

Volunteering Information Sheets

The Volunteer Centre has produced a series of Information Sheets on:

- setting up and managing a volunteer programme
- recruitment and development of volunteers and trustees.



They are available to download from our website or by contacting the Volunteer Centre (details on back page).

Which Expenses Should be Reimbursed?

In general, any reasonable expense incurred as part of the voluntary work should be reimbursed.

This can include:

- travel to and from the place of volunteering
- travel while volunteering
- meals taken while volunteering
- care of dependants, including children, during volunteering
- postage, phone calls, stationery etc, if volunteering from home
- cost of protective clothing/ special equipment etc.

You can put sensible limits on some expenses but be sure if you set limits on things like lunch expenses you must set your limit at a level that allows volunteers to have a hot meal and drink in the local cafés.

It is also acceptable to ask volunteers to come in by the cheapest reasonable form of public transport, although it may be necessary for some volunteers to take taxis perhaps because of disability. Do try to be flexible and budget for extra costs. If the volunteer needs to use their car to

and from the place of volunteering or for travel whilst volunteering, a mileage allowance could be paid. This will need to take account of current HM Revenue & Customs regulations and should not therefore exceed the recommended rates currently at 40p per mile for cars.

How to Reimburse Expenses

An out-of pocket expense is any cost that a volunteer has to pay out that they would not have incurred if they had not been volunteering for you. To show that any money you pay out as expenses is a reimbursement and not a payment, it is important that you ask for a receipt and reimburse the exact amount that the volunteer has paid. It is a good idea to keep receipts and records of money paid out in case there are any queries, so that you can prove that you have not been making payments.

It may be tempting to cut down on administration and just pay volunteers a set amount each day, but if they have not spent this amount then you are making a payment and creating a contract of employment. This gives volunteers the same rights as workers or employees – including the national

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Central Bedfordshire

minimum wage.

For all the above reasons it is important to reimburse out of pocket expenses only, which means asking volunteers to produce receipts, bus tickets etc. It makes sense to create a simple claim form that you can keep with copies of the documentation.

Volunteers should be able to claim back expenses as soon as it may be very difficult for people on low incomes to wait to be reimbursed. When deciding how to pay expenses, make sure that you are not creating unnecessary barriers. Many organisations prefer to reimburse expenses weekly or monthly rather than daily and some always reimburse by cheque. This can create problems for someone if they do not have a bank account or if they cannot afford to wait for money to be reimbursed. If possible, always try to reimburse expenses on the same day in cash. If you are not sure which methods of reimbursement suit people, just ask them. In some cases it may be more efficient to develop different systems for different people.

It is now permissible for volunteers on benefits under the Social Security Amendment (Volunteers) Regulations 2001, to have their expenses reimbursed in advance.

Any unspent money should be returned, and evidence of the expenses should still be collected.

Some volunteers may feel that they do not need or even should not be offered expenses. Explain the equal opportunities issue – not everyone can afford to write off costs incurred through volunteering. It's important that there is no stigma attached to claiming expenses, so it would be better if everyone put in a claim, even if they returned the sum as a donation. Another key reason for encouraging everyone to take their expenses is so that organisations have an accurate picture of volunteer costs for funders.

Further Information and Resources

For further information on developing an expenses policy or procedure contact the Development Officer at Voluntary and Community Action Central Bedfordshire. Or review the following resources:

- The Good Practice Guide for Everyone who Works with Volunteers, K Bowgett, K Dickie and M Restall, Volunteering England, 2nd Edition, 2002.
- Volunteer England website, www.volunteering.org.uk

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**Bossard House
West Street
Leighton Buzzard
Bedfordshire LU7 1DA**

**Tel: 01525 850559
Fax: 01525 376281
mail@action-centralbeds.org.uk
www.action-centralbeds.org.uk**

How can the Volunteer Centre help?

If you are a voluntary organisation or community group operating in southern Bedfordshire, we can help by:

- promoting your volunteering opportunities and signposting volunteers to your organisation
- providing information, guidance and training in all aspects of good practice and volunteer management.

Please give us a call on 01525 850559 or email volunteer@action-centralbeds.org.uk to arrange a meeting.