

What is flexible volunteering?

This information sheet provides advice on flexible volunteering: what it is and how offering flexible volunteering opportunities can benefit both volunteers and organisations.

What is flexible volunteering?

Flexible volunteering is volunteering that allows for greater freedom with tasks and opportunities. That can change depending on availability, skills and circumstances; flexible volunteering moves away from fixed roles and time commitments.

Why is flexible volunteering increasing in importance?

Increased awareness and demand for flexible volunteering opportunities is a natural consequence of Covid and communities organically rising up to address local need, the growth of social action volunteering in general, and the increased use of remote technologies and social media to support volunteering, charitable organisations and causes.

Also, people are now used to other aspects of their lives being more flexible. For example, you can now do your weekly shop at 3am on a Wednesday morning. People have the option to choose what they do, when, in what order and how, building their own 'life menus'. This means that more people, but perhaps especially younger people, have similar expectations about volunteering.



What are the benefits?

Flexible volunteering opportunities can increase the pool of potential volunteers, and also grow the pool of potential opportunities, as more formal or traditional roles that often encompassed multiple tasks get broken down. More flexibility also means that the opportunity is more likely to 'fit' the volunteer better, this makes for happier volunteers and often leads to increased commitment from volunteers.

"Volunteers want to be able to volunteer on their own terms, this can be hard for organisations to understand and accommodate, but it is an important principle in creating opportunities that are valuable to new and existing volunteers. Think about how different work areas can be broken down into smaller roles and be flexible to the needs of the volunteer. This will give greater flexibility to both the volunteer and the organisation. It will open the doors to more diverse volunteers, who will stay for longer and tell others about volunteering with your organisation." NCVO Time Well Spent report Jan 19

Different aspects of flexible volunteering

When thinking about how to make a volunteering opportunity more flexible, you may like to consider one of four different approaches:

1. A flexible approach to **time**

A volunteer can do the same task or tasks but at a time or frequency of the volunteer's choosing or they can spend variable amounts of time on the task or tasks. This is the most common way to incorporate flexibility into volunteering.

2. A flexible approach to the **task**

Someone may volunteer at the same time every week or for the same amount of time every week, but the task or role will change depending on the needs of the organisation. This type of flexible volunteering has very close links to cause-based volunteering as it is the overarching goals that the organisation is hoping to achieve that are more important to a volunteer than a specific role or task.

3. A flexible approach to the **volunteer organisation**

A person may change the organisation they volunteer with or the organisation may agree to share or send volunteers elsewhere. This may be based on what is needed at any given time in a community, similar to emergency response volunteering. A volunteer could go anywhere and do anything but without the emergency or time element.

4. A flexible approach to the **person**

The task, organisation and time all remain the same but the volunteer changes. It could be that a different family member, a friend or colleague volunteers for any given task or session or that the organisation puts together a flexible group of people who are interchangeable.

Frequently asked questions

How can we support flexible volunteering?

Whilst some volunteering does require a member of staff to be available, not everything needs direct support so when thinking about what you would like a volunteer to do, carefully consider the level of direct and indirect supervision that will be needed for each task or role.

Once you know what you would like a volunteer to do, and you have confirmed this with them, you need to make sure that the volunteering role or task has been communicated clearly to your volunteer and that everyone involved knows what is expected of them. Depending on the nature of the volunteering this does not have to be done in person; it could be done with a phone call, via email or text or it could be a list of set volunteering tasks that are clearly explained on your website.

Before volunteering takes place, make sure that your volunteer has everything they will need to fulfill the role. Do they need any resources or tools sending to them, will they need access codes or log in details or directions? If there is a time frame for completing a task, do they know this?



How do you support volunteers when staff are not working?

If people are volunteering at a time when a member of staff will not be on hand to answer questions or deal with any issues, does your volunteer know that there will not be a member of staff available?

If they do have a question or concern, do they know that it is ok to leave a voicemail or send an email, even though it may not be answered until later in the week?

If they do need additional information whilst volunteering how can they find this, is it on your website, or do you have a volunteers Facebook group?

If appropriate, discuss with your volunteer beforehand what may go wrong and what action would need to be taken, for example what should they do if they have a safeguarding concern.

How can you support volunteering from home?

Developing a sense of connection to your organisation is important. You can keep in touch by phone, text, email, or through social media. You also need to consider how volunteers can access training, support services and resources. This may include use of emails, access to computer facilities, data protection, expenses for telephone use and other costs, how tasks will be allocated, record keeping and opportunities to be in touch, both formally to support their volunteering and informal social opportunities to connect with other volunteers.

You should also still make time to say thank you and share feedback so volunteers know the difference they have made.



How do you communicate what needs doing?

Clear, regular communication is key to letting people know what you need. Do you have a central point where you can regularly post tasks that your organisation needs support with? This could be a shared physical notice board that people can pop in and look at when they are free and sign up to tasks, or it could also be virtual. You could have a Facebook page or closed group, or tweet your ask and tag in volunteers who follow you when you know they will be available, or it could be a standing news item on the front of your website. Another option would be to have a more experienced volunteer be responsible for contacting your volunteer pool to discuss upcoming opportunities.



Most importantly, people who regularly undertake flexible volunteering need to know when, how frequently, and where you will communicate them.

You can also advertise your volunteering opportunities for free on our volunteering directory, [Volunteering in North Yorkshire \(VINY\)](#).

How do you know a task has been completed?

Often it is obvious when a task has been completed but if it's not, and it is important that you know if a task is finished, then making time for a quick catch up with your volunteer can be helpful. It's always a good idea, particularly when a volunteer is new to your organisation, to book in some time as soon as

possible after their first task or day, to make sure that everything went ok and to address any questions or concerns. It can be really helpful for both parties and will also help to build a good relationship.

What if I'm not sure if flexible volunteering is right for a particular volunteer?

If you or your volunteer feel unsure about any aspect of volunteering, can they initially volunteer at a different time when a member of staff will be available to support them? This will help them build up their skills or confidence. Or can they undertake a different task or buddy up with a more experienced volunteer?

Is flexible volunteering different to micro volunteering?

Micro volunteering opportunities can be part of your flexible volunteering offer but they are not the same thing. Micro volunteering opportunities are usually short, simple and set tasks that require no commitment, no training or induction, no specific skills or knowledge and are completed start to finish by one person or group of people.

Flexible volunteering opportunities may also be a short, simple set tasks but they may also reoccur, take place over a longer period of time, require training or utilise specialist skills or knowledge. In short, flexible volunteering covers a broader range of volunteering opportunities, roles and tasks.

Useful websites and resources

[Community First Yorkshire's](#) website has a wide range of resources to support you with all aspects of volunteer management and coordination.

[Time Well Spent](#) The 2019 NCVO national survey on the volunteering experience explores the importance of flexibility to the volunteering experience.

Further support and information

For upcoming events and training related to volunteering, please visit our [website](#) for further information and to book a place.

Don't forget, you can advertise your volunteering roles for free on our [Volunteering in North Yorkshire \(VINY\)](#) directory.

If you need any further support, please complete our [enquiry form](#) and one of our volunteer support



team will be in touch to support you with your project.

If you have any other questions please do get in touch
communitysupport@communityfirstyorkshire.org.uk or call 01904 704177.

Updated 15/05/24 CG