



CARE  
FOR  
OUR  
CITY

WORKING  
WELL WITH

*Volunteers*

CHURCH  
URBAN  
FUND<sup>+</sup>



# CONTENTS

## 1. Scoping how you work with volunteers

- Reviewing work with volunteers (Appendix 1)
- A volunteer policy template (Appendix 2)
- Agreeing a volunteer policy - an illustrative case study for a church setting (Appendix 3)

## 2. Creating safer space for everyone with good safeguarding practice

### 3. Clarifying tasks

- Clarifying tasks - a checklist (Appendix 4)
- Clarifying tasks - a case study (Appendix 5)
- A sample task card (Appendix 6)
- A sample volunteer role description (Appendix 7)
- A volunteer role description template (Appendix 8)
- Volunteer-friendly vocabulary (Appendix 9)

### 4. Managing formalities

- A mutual expectations template (Appendix 10)
- A volunteer expenses form template (Appendix 11)
- A flowchart for doing a risk assessment (Appendix 12)
- A risk assessment template based on HSE sample risk assessments (Appendix 13)
- A risk assessment template using a numerical rating (Appendix 14)
- A volunteer enquiry form template (Appendix 15)
- A problem solving procedure template (Appendix 16)
- A volunteer contact information template (Appendix 17)

### 5. Recruiting volunteers

- Recruiting volunteers checklist (Appendix 18)
- 5.1. Where to find volunteers
- 5.2. Recruiting volunteers with additional support needs

### 6. Building good relationships

### 7. Encouraging development

### 8. Tackling difficulties

- A volunteer not following guidance given – a case study (Appendix 19)
- 8.1. Tackling specific difficulties

### 9. Appendix

# 1

## Scoping how you work with volunteers

Developing a volunteer policy or agreeing the principles about how you work with volunteers can seem daunting, but it gives you the opportunity to develop a series of answers to questions that will crop up during your work with volunteers.

Although it may feel that a policy is too bureaucratic for the varied and often informal way in which organisations work with volunteers, an agreement of principles can still be very helpful.

A volunteer policy, or statement of agreed principles need not be a long, overly complicated document.

**For organisations working with volunteers, a volunteer policy may be required by external partners or funders.**

### STARTING POINTS

It is helpful to agree the way in which you work with volunteers as this enables consistency and clarity.

#### Consistency

- It helps to ensure fairness and avoid some groups of volunteers inadvertently being treated differently to others.
- It can save time as you make decisions once and can then use those decisions as the basis for future work. This doesn't mean that decisions are set in stone - they can be reviewed in the light of how they work in practice.

#### Clarity

- Making considered decisions and being explicit about the basis on which you work with volunteers helps to manage the expectations of all those involved and to reduce the likelihood of conflict in the long term. For example, are expenses reimbursed? Can volunteers expect to contribute to decisions about the future of the organisation?
- Clarity is linked to transparency. Making thoughtful decisions and communicating them openly gives an opportunity for people to discuss whether principles are right and avoids the sense that decisions are made arbitrarily.

### PRACTICALITIES

Whether an organization has fairly formal structures or is a more informal setup, it is good to think about what volunteers contribute and how you can best work together.

It is fruitful to consider some generic questions in a planned way. For a policy to have credibility, and to work in practice, it needs to be honest, agreed and realistic. Those people working with volunteers also need to be aware that it exists as a working document and guide.

### QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS COULD BE:

#### What different groups of volunteers are involved?

- These might include groups such as those taking turns to prepare a venue or to serve coffee, crèche leaders, committees or, in church settings, authorised lay ministers.

#### How do people become volunteers?

- Is the opportunity to volunteer open and inclusive?
- Are people enabled to use their talents, skills and experiences?

#### How do you communicate with volunteers?

- Is it easy for all groups of volunteers to hear about, and be involved with, key developments and decisions that happen?
- If not, how could this be done better?

#### Which volunteers have a strong voice in the life of an organisation?

- If some don't, how will that be addressed?
- How can you involve all volunteers in thinking about what you do and in shaping any policy or principles?

#### Have you considered administrative and legal issues relating to volunteers?

- Safeguarding
- Health and Safety
- Insurance
- Do you cover any expenses?

**For more information, see [Managing formalities](#)**

### Do different groups of volunteers have a coordinator?

- Does this person act as a point of reference, support that group of volunteers, help them develop skills or nurture their particular contribution?

### How easy is it for volunteers to rotate between roles?

- In church settings, for example, research shows that rotation among people in volunteer leadership corresponds with churches which report more growth (The Church Growth Research Programme).

### How are volunteers valued and thanked?

- Are all groups of volunteers thanked or is the contribution of some more publicly acknowledged than others?
- How can you ensure that roles are explicitly and implicitly valued?

### What do you do if something goes wrong?

- Are issues that arise dealt with in a way that is consistent with your organisation's values?

For more ideas, see [Tackling difficulties](#)

## WRITING A VOLUNTEER POLICY

A written volunteer policy:

- reflects your culture and intentions when working with volunteers.
- explains why and how you involve volunteers.
- answers common questions that volunteers ask.

A Volunteer policy is agreed by a governing body and all related documents should be consistent with the Volunteer policy.

For a **Volunteer policy template in the form of a series of questions and an example of the process of writing a policy**, see our **template Volunteer policy** and for a **case study for use in a church setting**, see **Agreeing a volunteer policy**.

If you want to advertise for volunteers through a volunteer centre they may expect you to have a policy in place.



# 2

## Creating safer space for everyone with good safeguarding practice

In a safe and welcoming environment, where everyone is respected and valued, it is also everyone's responsibility to keep people safe from harm, harassment, bullying, abuse, exploitation and neglect.

Organisations that deliver charitable activities have a duty to safeguard volunteers, staff members, participants and donors.

### STARTING POINTS

**Effective safeguarding encourages habits, practices, rules and procedures which keep people safe while they participate in your activities.**

Good practice in safeguarding creates safer space through:

- a culture of safety supported by the effective implementation of policies and procedures (including safeguarding, confidentiality and data protection, health and safety, equality and diversity, and safer recruitment).
- recognising concerns, responding well, recording accurately what is reported and making effective and appropriate referrals.

Safeguarding also considers staff and volunteers who are perceived as people who can be trusted, and those who may be a risk to others.

**Anyone can find themselves at risk of abuse, and safeguarding policies and procedures should make it clear that anyone might need safeguarding.**

Types of abuse include physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, financial, domestic, spiritual, discriminatory and institutional abuse, and neglect, criminal exploitation, radicalisation and modern slavery.

Both children and adults at risk need safeguarding, but the approach differs. The way abuse is reported for children and adults at risk is not the same and the legislation for managing each is different.

**A child is defined as a person who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.**

### The aims of safeguarding children are:

- to protect children from maltreatment
- to prevent impairment of children's mental and physical health or development

- to ensure that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care

- to take action to enable all children to have the best outcomes

**An adult at risk of abuse or neglect is defined as a person, aged 18 years or over, who has need of care and support, who is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect as a result of those care and support needs, and who is unable to protect themselves from abuse or neglect.**

### The aims of safeguarding adults at risk are:

- to prevent harm and reduce the risk of abuse or neglect
- to stop abuse or neglect wherever possible
- to support those adults in making choices and having control about how they want to live
- to promote an approach that concentrates on improving life for the adults concerned and to address what has caused the abuse or neglect

**Your organisation will need to have a Safeguarding Policy that is compliant with national and local Safeguarding policies.**

### THIS SHOULD CONSIDER THINGS LIKE:

#### Risks

- What are the potential risks of your activities for children or adults at risk of abuse?

Free guidance from The National Council for Voluntary Organisations is available at [Understanding the risks | NCVO](#).

#### Responsibilities

- Who is the Safeguarding lead in your organisation who will work with your local authority Safeguarding partnerships or boards, and for making any reports which might need to be made?

Free guidance from The National Council for Voluntary Organisations is available at [Roles and responsibilities | NCVO](#).

#### Vigilance

- What are the signs of vulnerability or abuse of which your volunteers and staff need to be aware?

Free guidance from The National Council for Voluntary Organisations is available at [Recognise, respond and report | NCVO](#).

#### Reporting

- How are potential Safeguarding concerns recorded, reported and communicated?

Free guidance from The National Council for Voluntary Organisations is available at [Recognise, respond and report | NCVO](#).

**Your safeguarding practice must be proportional to the level of risk involved. The time and effort you will need to spend in meeting your duties increases when you work with children or adults at risk.**

## PRACTICALITIES

**Safeguarding children and adults at risk is a statutory duty.**

Charitable organisations, including churches, have policies that make people aware of how to raise concerns and which must be implemented. Safeguarding guidelines also help volunteers and staff protect themselves from damaging accusations.

- If you have regular contact with children under 18 or adults at risk you need to implement a Safeguarding Policy.
- A Safeguarding Policy needs to be backed up by ways of operating that are realistic and embedded within a culture that encourages people to raise concerns.
- The procedures established by your organisation should be supported by regular safeguarding training.
- Ensure that volunteers are aware of the importance of safeguarding right from the start and communicate this as part of your ethos rather than just as a requirement of law.
- Some roles may require DBS checks but it is illegal to do checks for roles that are not eligible so it is important to be sure which roles are eligible. Checks for volunteers are free but if you use an organisation to do them for you, you may have to pay an administration charge.

## Guidance available

- The Ann Craft Trust has a [checklist for safeguarding adults](#) to support organisations to safeguard adults at risk and minimize risk of harm.
- NSPCC Learning has a [safeguarding and child protection self-assessment tool](#) which helps your organisation audit current safeguarding and child protection arrangements.
- The [Digisafe toolkit](#) offers guidance on building safeguarding measures into the design and delivery of digital services.
- To determine the eligibility of roles for DBS checks, NCVO offers guidance at [Deciding which DBS checks to carry out | NCVO](#). You can contact DBS with an eligibility query. E-mail them at [customerservices@db.gov.uk](mailto:customerservices@db.gov.uk) or 03000 200 190 giving them details of the role.

## Guidance for churches

**For church settings, current guidance on Safeguarding is also available from:**

- The Church of England: [Safeguarding: A safer church | The Church of England](#) or contact your Diocesan Safeguarding Officer
- The Baptist Union: [The Baptist Union of Great Britain : Safeguarding](#)
- The Methodist Church: [Safeguarding \(methodist.org.uk\)](#) or contact your District Safeguarding Officer
- The United Reformed Church: [Safeguarding - United Reformed Church](#)
- The Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency: [catholicsafeguarding.org.uk](#)



# 3

## Clarifying tasks

How a task is done matters as much as getting the job done. The person who serves drinks in a way that makes people feel valued is not only offering refreshment but is also sharing the values of your organization. The converse is also true!

If a task matters enough for someone to give up their time to do it then it matters enough to make sure that the person doing it actually knows what they're meant to be doing and why. It also matters that their contribution is valued.

### STARTING POINTS

#### What is the task?

- What needs to be done?
- Are there assumptions that you or the volunteer may be making about what a task involves?
- Are there aspects of the task that are essential, or which need to be done in a particular way?
- Are there aspects of the task that the volunteer can shape more flexibly?

#### Why does the task matter?

- What are the reasons for doing this task?
- As well as the immediate effect, how does the task contribute to the bigger picture?
- How might the task, and the way in which it is done, reflect the values of the organisation or project?

#### Who will be a reference point and provide guidance for the volunteer?

- Who will ensure that a volunteer knows what they are doing, answer any questions, and help them feel appreciated and supported?
- This doesn't have to default to 'the person at the top'. Designating who is to provide support can help share the load and can help develop those who take on the role.

#### Are there things that need to be in place to enable the task to be done, and done safely?

- Does the volunteer have access to any equipment that may be needed?
- Are there particular risks and hazards associated with doing the task?
- What can you do to help the volunteer minimize potential problems for themselves or others?

**For more guidance on formalities like insurance, risk assessment and safeguarding see [Managing formalities](#).**



## PRACTICALITIES

Every time that someone is asked to do something, those four basic questions should be asked and answered but how formally that is done will depend on the context. It's important not to put unnecessary barriers in the way of simple or one-off acts of service.

Below are a some possible ways to ensure that it's clear what someone is being asked to do. The suggestions range from behind the scenes to fairly formal and structured and they are ideas to get you started: you may well have other ideas of what could be helpful where you are. For all formats, decide a clear description of what you are asking a volunteer to do.

### Checklists

- In an informal situation you may not want to give the volunteer any written information about the task but it can still be useful for the person responsible to use a checklist to ensure that they have communicated all the important information.
- Depending on your situation, the checklist could be the responsibility of an administrator, the person responsible for a group of volunteers or, in a church, a clergy person or churchwarden.
- See [Clarifying tasks checklist](#).

### Welcome card

- A useful example from within church settings is the card sometimes given to godparents welcoming them to their responsibilities.
- A welcome card containing some key information could be given to new volunteers when they take on a role.

- This could either be given informally or at an occasion when new volunteers are welcomed.
- See a [Sample task card](#), which can be adapted.

### Role description

- This is the most formal option but can still be kept quite simple and is very useful.
- It represents standard good practice when working with volunteers. Like a job description, it tells both the volunteer and organisation what the volunteer is being asked to do, who they report to and what the role involves.
- Some role descriptions go into more detail, like how often someone is volunteering and on what days but this is not essential.
- Clarifying what a role involves makes it easier to think about who it might suit and where to find them.
- Clarifying a role can also identify what equipment, training or support might be needed to make it work and ensure that anything necessary to do the role is available for a volunteer when they start.
- Use the role description to discuss the role with potential volunteers and identify things that they will enjoy or find easy, and anything that might bore or challenge them.
- Although it is similar to a job description, it is important not to stray into the vocabulary of 'job' and 'work' as this blurs the legal boundaries between working and volunteering and can cause problems. See [Volunteer-friendly vocabulary](#) to use.  
See a [Sample volunteer role description](#) which can be adapted.
- Free guidance from The National Council for Voluntary Organisations is available at [Writing volunteer role descriptions | NCVO](#).





# 4

## Managing formalities

Community groups vary enormously in how formally they work with volunteers. Putting things on paper can help with clarity and consistency, and is often a legal or organisational requirement.

Use the list below to consider your approach to working with volunteers in the light of some key documents and processes that represent 'good practice' when working formally with volunteers. These may be useful to you in the form suggested or you may simply use the principles behind them to inform what you do. Whatever you choose to do has to fit your situation and help you achieve your aims. The sample documents suggested are a starting point or guide rather a finished product.

In all documents relating to volunteers it is important to avoid the language of employment as that can cause legal difficulties. For suggestions of language to use or avoid see [Volunteer-friendly vocabulary](#).

### Volunteer policy

- See [Scoping how you work with volunteers](#).

### Volunteer role description

- See [Clarifying tasks](#).

### Mutual expectations

- This is a statement of things like cooperation, support, cover with insurance cover, etc.
- This is not a contract as this can imply employment and cause legal problems.
- It clarifies that it is right for volunteers and organisations or project can rightly have certain expectations of each other.
- Because it's easy to assume that everyone shares the same expectations and this is not always true, it can be useful to have a way of discussing what the expectations actually are.
- Mutual expectations are ideally addressed when first discussing a particular role and/or when a volunteer has an induction or similar.
- It provides a reference point if things begin to go wrong, as the organisation and the volunteer can be brought back to what was explicitly agreed at the outset.
- It is much harder to begin to raise the topic when a lack of shared expectations becomes apparent.
- See a [Mutual expectations template](#) document which can be adapted.
- See a [Sample task card](#) for new volunteers.

### Volunteer expenses

- Reimbursing out of pocket expenses avoids excluding people who may not be able to afford to volunteer because of, e.g. the cost of travel.
- Decide whether expenses are available for all roles and if there is a cap on expenses.
- You may only reimburse actual out of pocket expenses that are related to a volunteer's specific role.
- You may not pay an allowance or pay for things that do not clearly relate to the role
- A simple expenses form can help with clarity and administration.
- See a [Volunteer expenses form template](#) which can be adapted.

### Safeguarding policy

- See [Creating safer space for everyone with good safeguarding practice](#)

### Confidentiality and data protection

- The meaning and limits of confidentiality are differently understood in different contexts so it is important to clarify what it means in your context, both for the sake of good relationships with people with whom you work and to ensure that you meet your legal responsibilities with regard to data protection.
- People will need explanations of why confidentiality and data protection matter and how to act. Real examples are more likely to be memorable.
- Organisations, including churches, need to discuss with volunteers, approaches and limits to confidentiality in specific contexts including when safeguarding concerns are raised.
- In a formal situation, if volunteers will have access to confidential information, a confidentiality agreement can be covered at induction, including an explanation of why you are asking them to sign it, why it matters, what sort of information is confidential and who to ask if they are unsure.
- The Information Commissioner's Office offers free information on [Data protection principles - guidance and resources | ICO](#), including useful examples.

### Health and safety

- All organisations, including churches, need to exercise a duty of care to all, including staff and volunteers, and to assess and manage risk.
- Think about what volunteers are doing and ensure that they and others are able to stay safe and healthy.
- Consider any risks involved in particular tasks and how to reduce the risks, especially on risks that are highly likely to happen or would have a really serious outcome.
- Any accidents will affect both the volunteer and the organisation's ability to function, and could damage your reputation.

- Make sure that when you introduce someone to a new role you make them aware of Health and Safety issues, how to avoid problems and who to talk to if there is a problem.
- It is a legal requirement to have written Health and Safety policies and risk assessments if you have 5 or more employees.
- It is also best practice to do so irrespective of the number of people involved in your activities.
- If you already have a Health and Safety policy, make sure it includes your volunteers.
- If you don't have a Health and Safety policy, write one even if you are technically exempt, because you still have a duty in law to operate in a safe manner.
- This is about care and not about paranoia or box-ticking.
- Your insurance policy may also require that you assess risks for your volunteers.
- The Health and Safety Executive website ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)) has clear information, specifically aimed at voluntary organisations.
- See a [Flowchart for doing a risk assessment](#).
- See a [Risk assessment template based on HSE sample risk assessments](#) which can be adapted.
- See a [Risk assessment template using a numerical rating](#) to give a risk rating combining severity and likelihood.

### Volunteer enquiry form

- Similar to an application form, a Volunteer enquiry form, provides a more impersonal route for those who prefer it to get in touch initially.
- It is only necessary for more formal volunteering roles.
- It should be as simple as possible and you should be prepared to substitute it with a chat.
- It can be an efficient way of getting basic information from prospective volunteers, including contact details, why they are interested in getting involved, and their availability.
- It should never be the only way of expressing an interest. Some people struggle with forms and some people are bored by them.
- As well as paper copies, if you have a website then have it available to download, including a version that potential volunteers can fill in and return by email rather than just a PDF file.
- For more formal situations or larger organisations, see a [Volunteer enquiry form template](#) which can be adapted.

### Recruitment process

- See [Recruiting volunteers](#).

### Induction

- Start volunteers off in a new role in a way that gives everyone confidence.
- Set time aside when a volunteer starts to:
  - ensure they understand purpose of the organisation and key relationships.
  - ensure they understand their role, how it fits in with the bigger picture and why it matter
  - ensure they can ask questions as necessary
  - cover essential policies or procedures
  - cover expenses policies, contacts and practicalities that they will need to know to help them flourish in the role and provide the best support possible to those they support
- An induction doesn't necessarily need to be one session and can be an introductory period.
- Inductions can be done individually or in groups, whichever is most practical.

### Problem solving procedure

- When problems occur – whether the problem is perceived by you or the volunteer – a Problem solving procedure acknowledges that you are committed to finding resolutions.
- While most problems can be tackled informally, if that doesn't work, more formal solutions are available through a fair and transparent process.
- It needs to be simple and clear, as protracted procedures are really stressful for everyone.
- Make volunteers aware of this procedure at induction.
- While it may seem similar to a staff grievance procedure, a Problem solving procedure must avoid implying that volunteers are employees and respect the distinctive contribution of volunteers.
- For more formal situations or larger organisations, see a [Problem solving procedure template](#) which can be adapted.





### Emergency contact information

- As part of your care for volunteers and particularly in situations where people are not well known, this provides a note of who to contact if your volunteer has an accident.
- You are unlikely to need it but it's no good waiting until an emergency happens before you realise you don't know who to contact.
- A simple form can be completed at induction, although it can be better to send it in advance and ask them to bring it in so that they can check details with their emergency contact.
- See a [Volunteer contact information template](#) which can be adapted.

### Insurance

- Insurance can cover a range of potential risks where volunteers may be involved in an organisation's projects or activities.
- Insurance includes:
  - Employers' Liability Insurance
  - Public Liability Insurance
  - Trustee Indemnity Insurance (check if extra cover is needed if you are handling large grants or projects)
- In church settings, insurance can also include Pastoral Care indemnity but extra cover may be needed for more formal counselling or advice.
- As part of your care for volunteers and those with whom they come into contact, the Association of British Insurers states that voluntary organisations need to have Employers' Liability Insurance to cover all volunteers and employees who are not family members. Organisations, including churches, with no employees should therefore have this to cover activity undertaken on their behalf.
- Make sure that you have followed good practice guidelines relating to safeguarding, confidentiality and data protection, health and safety, and risk assessment.
- Let your insurer know that you involve volunteers and in what roles and activities they are involved.
- Some roles may incur additional charges, e.g. night shelters, debt advice or formal counselling.
- Ensure that it is clearly defined what the volunteer is doing on behalf of the organization or project.
- The agreed tasks should be described in a written Volunteer Role Description or recorded in minutes of the organisation or project.
- See [Clarifying tasks](#).
- Volunteers should know that only these activities are covered by insurance unless there is formal agreement otherwise.
- The Association of British Insurers has produced a guide to insurance products has a dedicated area of their website for [Voluntary organisations and insurance](#) | | ABI.

# 5

## Recruiting volunteers

Considering how you recruit people to the right roles can help to ensure that volunteers have a positive experience, supportive relationships are maintained and tasks get done.

You may often be recruiting volunteers who are already known to you and part of your community, as in a church context, rather than people joining you to fulfil a specific role. This fluidity is positive in many ways, but it is worth bearing in mind that if things go wrong it can be particularly challenging.

### STARTING POINTS

When finding volunteers, an immediate concern may be filling a rota or getting a task done. However you also want volunteers to flourish in their role, develop as individuals, be empowered to use innate talents and, in a church setting, to enable volunteers to grow in their discipleship.

Volunteering can also be an opportunity for people to take on a role and discover a skill or interest that was not previously obvious to them, so recruiting volunteers may not always be about finding people who are already highly competent. Sometimes the focus of volunteering will be on the volunteer's opportunity for development rather than on getting a task done. It may be that volunteering can help someone develop confidence, enhance their CV or that involvement in volunteering can help them develop skills. This type of volunteering can be hugely beneficial for all concerned but you will need to be able to invest energy and time in making it work.

In a church setting, you may have a ready source of volunteers but you may also want to look more widely. One consideration is whether a role actually requires the volunteer to be an active member of your congregation or whether you could cast your net further as a part of your involvement with your wider community.

Before a volunteer takes on a new role there are 3 key areas to consider:

#### What are they going to do?

- Do you have a task or role that you have already identified needs doing?
- Alternatively, has someone come to you offering a skill or wanting to do something new?
- Are there ways of involving people so that everyone has the opportunity to participate?

Whichever is the starting point, some exploration of what might be involved is going to be necessary to clarify what will be done.

#### How will you match people to suitable roles?

- How will you find out about people's existing skills and experience or their potential to develop into new roles?
- What will you do if someone wants to take on a role for which they don't appear to be suited?
- How will you support people who have the potential to develop through a role but are not yet ready to take full responsibility for it?

#### What are the practical considerations?

- Does the role need to be done at a particular time or place?
- Do you have the right support in place to help things work successfully?
- Have you clarified practicalities such as travel expenses?

### PRACTICALITIES

The practicalities of recruiting volunteers will depend on your starting points and on how formal your set-up is but there are a number of questions that you may find it helpful to ask.

Not all questions will apply everywhere but considering in advance appropriate responses in your situation will be helpful.

#### Do you have a specific task that needs doing?

- See [Clarifying tasks](#) for guidance on defining a clear volunteer role.

#### Does the task have any particular requirements?

- Identifying these will help you work out where you might find people who are likely to be well-suited to the task.
- Does it require particular skills? If so, where might you find someone with those skills?
- Does it need to be done at a particular time? If so, who might be available at those times?

- Does it need to be done at a particular time? If so, who might be available at those times?
- Does it need to be done in a particular place or could it be done by someone at home?
- Does it need to be taken on as a long term commitment or is it the sort of thing that people can dip in and out of?
- Does it require a DBS check?
- In, for example, a church setting, does it need to be done by a practising Christian or could this be an opportunity to involve a wider community?

### **Do you need someone to help immediately, soon, or are you planning ahead?**

- This will have an impact on where it makes sense to look for volunteers. If you need someone to stack the chairs tomorrow you aren't going to advertise in the local paper!

### **Will you be able to pay any out of pocket expenses?**

- For example, can travel expenses be claimed? This may not be common in a local organisation where many people are within walking distance but it can affect who is able to afford to volunteer.

### **How will you let people know you need volunteers?**

- Where might you 'advertise' for volunteers? See Taking on volunteers – Sources for suggestions
- How can you be positive and specific about what needs to be done, avoiding a generic appeal for volunteers?
- Do people who are not members of your organisation know that you exist and what you do? If not, how can you raise awareness so that it's easier to attract volunteers now and in the future?

### **What will happen if someone is interested?**

- Have you made it easy for someone to let you know that they are interested in volunteering?
- Is there someone coordinating the search for volunteers for a particular task so that things don't get confused?
- If you have quite a formal structure and might have lots of enquiries, will you use an enquiry form?

### **What will you do if someone is interested in volunteering to do something but the role may not be right for them?**

- Do you have a process like a trial period, a training course or an informal interview that will help everyone judge whether or not the role matches the individual concerned?
- Will you say no to someone if they are not suitable? If so, how? If not, how will you support them or adapt the task to make it work?

- Can you offer an alternative role that would suit them?

### **How will a volunteer know what is expected of them?**

- Is there a description (written or verbal) of what is involved and why it matters? For more information see [Clarifying the task](#).
- When the volunteer starts, how will you introduce them to anything they need to know? (e.g. informal starting chat, some written instructions, buddying with an existing volunteer, structured induction). For more information see [Encouraging development](#).
- How will you establish what expectations are involved on both sides? For ways of clarifying expectations see a [Sample volunteer role description](#), a [Mutual expectations template](#) and a [Sample task card](#).

### **How will you approach things if someone gradually takes on regular volunteering tasks?**

- This may be someone who begins by attending something and then offers casual help that grows into regular involvement.
- How will you encourage involvement and still cover any important information or guidance that they might need?

## **Where to find volunteers**

There are loads of ways of getting the recruitment message out there. The methods you choose will depend on who you are trying to reach (which will depend on what you want them to do).

Some have the advantage of being very easy to target at 'known quantities' but can limit your pool of volunteers while some are much broader in their target but can give you more work selecting those who will thrive in a particular role.



## IT IS HELPFUL TO LOOK AT :

- the role and what sort of person it will suit
- the number of volunteers needed
- the time frame – is it urgent or a long term project?

You can then decide where and how you would be most likely to attract suitable volunteers.

### Via your existing volunteers

- If your existing volunteers value their roles they are likely to be good at encouraging others to get involved.
- If you are wanting to recruit, your existing volunteers should be kept in the loop anyway and they may have ideas about advertising that you've not thought about.
- Can lead to lots of similar volunteers – people tend to ask people like them
- Can end up always asking the same people to do things and overlook those who are less established.

### Word of mouth

- Often incredibly effective – people like to be asked
- Often a speedy way of recruiting as it's direct
- You can target people you know have the skills, interest or commitment.
- You can encourage people to think of other people who might like to do something.
- Can lead to lots of similar volunteers – people tend to ask people like them
- Can end up always asking the same people to do things and overlook those who are less established

### Local volunteer centre

- Recruiting volunteers is what they do!
- They can advise about other sources for specific things like business expertise, pro bono work, etc.
- Gives access to a wider pool with a huge range of skills, including some people who need to volunteer for their own personal development, skills development, confidence, etc.
- This can be a strong act of outreach on behalf of your organization and its work.
- A volunteer centre will expect you to have some documentation in place – but should also be able to help you put it together if necessary.
- If you are open to a broader selection of volunteers you will need to select carefully and consciously, e.g. will someone fit with the ethos of how you work? If they have extra support needs are you equipped to meet them?

### Local school/college/university

- Many universities, and some schools and colleges, have teams specifically employed to encourage students to volunteer because they know how valuable it is for them.
- This can help you access an age range and set of skills not always well represented amongst volunteers, and enable you to help support young people in building their skills base, CVs and confidence.
- Can be time consuming to set up and manage
- Can end up being a short term commitment from a student or restricted to term time.

### Volunteer Databases

- Can give you access to a huge range of volunteers
- A larger pool can mean more work selecting and can open you up to a lot of very speculative enquiries.
- Do IT is the national database of volunteering opportunities. Search more than 1 million volunteering opportunities by interest, activity or location and apply online: [Do IT | Connecting people to do good things](#)
- Reach Volunteering connects professionals and charities through skill-based volunteer and trustee opportunities, both project-based and long-term: [Volunteer opportunities | Reach Volunteering](#)
- Volunteering Matters build volunteering projects and programmes to enable people to participate in their community: [For our community - Volunteering Matters](#)

### Posters

- Eye catching and can be widely distributed
- Can be ignored if they're up for too long
- Not effective if they just say 'we need volunteers'

### Article in a local newspaper or on a local news website

- Reaches beyond the usual audience
- Helps raise awareness of what you're doing which can bring long term benefits even if not short term volunteers
- Can mean there's more work in selecting volunteers if you have very specific criteria for the role

### Twitter

- Quick to send out to your followers
- Can be retweeted and reach a wide audience
- Can direct people to more information or a contact person
- This very broad brush approach won't suit every role.

## Facebook

- Easy to share an opportunity if you have a Facebook page and easy to update
- Can link to documents like role descriptions or application form if you have them
- Can reach a wide audience
- Not everyone is on Facebook – but then not everyone reads the newspapers either!

## Website

- Can reach a broad audience
- Easy to keep updated and can make relevant documents easy to download for prospective volunteers
- Can be a very broad brush approach and can result in lots of very speculative enquiries
- Not everyone has internet access

## IN CHURCH SETTINGS:

### Advert in the church pew sheet

- Easy to do and means that people will probably take the details home with them.
- Some people just don't read them or don't think the information applies to them.

### Mention in the spoken notices

- Everyone in church is aware that you are looking for a volunteer, not just those 'in the know'.
- It doesn't limit your audience to those who like reading things.
- Not everyone listens.
- Not everyone is in church.

### Article in church magazine

- May reach people beyond those in church on a particular week.
- May reach readers who are not regular members so might be more inclusive and access a bigger pool.
- Not everyone reads things.
- Sometimes people read things and don't realise it's addressed to them.

## Recruiting volunteers with additional support needs

Organisations and projects able to welcome and affirm the gifts of all mirror inclusivity and diversity.

Sometimes it is easy to see what people's abilities are. Sometimes it requires a bit more effort to discern potential and to provide the support necessary for that potential to be realised.

## STARTING POINTS

The points below may help you to consider what is involved:

### People have talents, skills and experiences that differ

- You want to empower volunteers to use their talents, skills and experiences.
- For some that will be using skills they are already aware of. For some it will be about developing in new ways.

### Involvement is important

- Through involvement, organisations and projects can encourage people to grow and develop, as well as building a community where all are valued.
- Sometimes the focus of volunteering will be on the volunteer's opportunity for involvement rather than on getting something done.
- This type of volunteering can be hugely beneficial for all concerned but requires you to be able to invest energy and time in considering how to make it work.

### There may be obstacles that hinder some people getting involved

- These might include lack of confidence, a need for additional support, some adjustments to how the task has previously been done or physical adjustments to space or equipment.
- It pays to be realistic but also imaginative about the obstacles and how it is possible to overcome them.

### Some may have a ministry to enable others to be involved

- Some people are good at enabling others to use or discover their potential and overcome any possible obstacles.
- Some may have specific skills or experience, such as mentoring, while other may have unnamed but invaluable gifts.



## PRACTICALITIES

### Identifying different volunteers' needs

All volunteers have needs: some are standard and some require more thought to respond to. In order to adapt to different people's needs, it is necessary to identify any barriers that might make it hard for them to be involved.

- Sometimes the need will be for physical or practical adjustments, e.g. the volunteer using a wheelchair.
- Sometimes a volunteer will have particular support needs, e.g. fuller explanations or another volunteer alongside to mentor them.
- Some volunteer involvement will include addressing particular formalities, e.g. for those claiming benefits or with a criminal record.

### Making reasonable adjustments

- There is no legal requirement to make adjustments for volunteers, because they are not paid employees. However organisations and projects can reflect inclusion by enabling all people to use their talents, skills and experiences.
- Advice and guidance is available about making adjustments in order to overcome particular barriers experienced by people with specific conditions, especially from specialist organisations supporting people with a particular.
- Free guidance from The National Council for Voluntary Organisations is available at [How can we make volunteering more inclusive for disabled people? | NCVO.](#)

### Volunteers in specific circumstances

- It is possible, and often helpful, for people to volunteer whilst on benefits. Free guidance from The National Council for Voluntary Organisations is available at [Volunteers who claim benefits | NCVO.](#)
- A criminal record need not be a bar to all types of volunteering and it can be important for those with criminal records to be given an opportunity to provide evidence of their skills and willingness to be involved.

### Balancing idealism and reality

- Organisations and projects rightly want to involve and support people but need to discern which particular roles and contexts will enable a volunteer to flourish and which will not be appropriate. This is for the benefit of the volunteer as well as the church.
- A realistic conversation about what someone is hoping for and what can be provided is an important part of matching volunteers to roles in a way that is positive for all.
- It is important to treat people as individuals rather than make assumptions based on stereotypes.



# 6

## Building good relationships

Volunteering, because it isn't contractual or paid, is dependent on positive relationships. Open, mutually beneficial and respectful relationships with volunteers is an enormous help to making things run smoothly.

In organisations where people already know each other, it can be assumed that there is no need to give extra attention to nurturing and developing relationships and so opportunities to do so can be overlooked. Having good patterns and checklists in place (even if they are mental ones) can make it easier to ensure that useful ways of building positive relationships are not forgotten.

### STARTING POINTS

It is helpful to agree the way in which you work with volunteers as this enables consistency and clarity.

#### **The volunteer is the focus – the 'person', not just the 'task'.**

- Care of one another is crucial and people who feel valued usually operate more effectively.

#### **Relationships develop when people feel valued as members of a team rather than invisible cogs in a mechanism.**

- It is good to take opportunities to publicly acknowledge the contribution that is made by volunteers, or groups of volunteers, as well as doing that individually.

#### **People vary, and one way of relating to some volunteers may not be appropriate to all.**

- People will feel valued if you recognise their individual starting point so that:
  - you do not patronise them (e.g. by telling an experienced person how to do something basic).
  - you do not embarrass them (e.g. by putting them in a position where it is difficult for them to ask for help).
  - you do not exploit them (e.g. by taking them for granted, expecting unreasonable timescales, or not providing suitable equipment or resources to do the task required).

### PRACTICALITIES

Good interpersonal skills, and an interest in enabling people to use their talents and skills, help to foster good relationships. Here are a few key points to bear in mind:

#### **Notice volunteers and engage with them**

- Say hello, remember people's names, thank people for specific things they have done, listen to their ideas, take an interest in them, answer messages promptly, and include thanks when sending things like rotas.

#### **Communicate**

- Keep the lines of communication open – both ways!
- Let people know what is happening and anything that might be changing.
- Communicate regularly.
- Whether you use face to face communication, phone calls, e-mail or messaging, the methods will depend on your volunteers and should not exclude some.
- Make it easy for volunteers to communicate with you by being receptive when they do, letting them know the best times and ways of getting hold of you.
- Try to respond quickly but if you can't, let volunteers know so that they don't feel ignored.

#### **Arrange opportunities to meet**

- Less formal opportunities, including social events, enable volunteers to get together with other volunteers, or board members or trustees of a project.
- More formal opportunities include a regular chat to catch up, a discussion about how a role is going or formal supervision.
- Enabling volunteers to meet together can be helpful and affirming.

#### **Affirm the value of what volunteers are doing**

- Explain the value of the task itself and its contribution to an organisation or project's vision, aims and objectives.
- Regularly reinforce the message both privately and publicly.

#### **Ensure that volunteering is mutually beneficial**

- Be aware of what volunteers can gain from the experience and try to facilitate it.
- Remember that motivation and circumstances change and try to make it easy for people to update you about these, and to change roles.

#### **Tackle potential difficulties**

- Difficulties can arise when expectations, on either side, don't match what happens in practice.
- Clarify expectations at the beginning.
- Encourage volunteers to contribute ideas. This can enable them to mention things that need changing within a positive framework, rather than as a complaint.
- See more on [Tackling difficulties](#).

#### **Remember that people vary**

- Volunteers differ in all sorts of ways, including their motivations, the type and amount of support they want and need, and the extent to which they want to develop through their role.
- Volunteers, and relationships, are most likely to flourish if individual characteristics and preferences are valued alongside a recognition of the importance of functioning as a whole.

#### **Help people to leave well**

- When a volunteer finishes a role, mark their contribution positively and ensure that they know they have been valued.

# 7

## Encouraging development

### STARTING POINTS

Offering appropriate development opportunities can involve finding a delicate balance.

Some volunteers may start with a lot of experience or knowledge gained elsewhere and may feel patronised by simplistic training. Some may just want to do a particular task, are not focused on development and could feel pressurised if you keep trying to develop them.

### IT IS VALUABLE TO REMEMBER THAT:

- volunteering can develop confidence and self-esteem.
- for some, the provision of training may be a way of demonstrating that the organisation takes their role seriously and invests in it.
- some may feel anxious about their ability to fulfil a role and will need support either to learn what is involved or simply to be reassured that they are capable and valued.
- some may outgrow particular roles or get bored, and for them development means a new challenge. They may be helped by moving to a new role, or taking on more responsibility within a role (e.g. sorting out rotas, leading sessions, mentoring or buddying others).

### PRACTICALITIES

#### Support and training when people begin

Giving people the opportunity to make a good start when taking on a new task lays the foundations for future effectiveness. For some tasks, there will be individuals who need minimal induction, whilst others will need more support and might need induction over a longer period.

Induction includes enabling volunteers to understand their role in practice and how the task contributes to the aims, outreach and mission of the organisation. It is an opportunity to establish who will be the key person to provide support and their role in providing guidance. It is also an opportunity to establish that volunteers have permission to ask questions and contribute ideas.

Some approaches will be informal, and others more formal. Some of the decisions you make will be pragmatic, e.g. Is it easier to do introductory sessions on pre-booked dates or to just see people individually as they are ready? Is a volunteer likely to value written information to refer back to, or will they find it easier to have a more verbal introduction? Whatever you do, it has to be

manageable for you and useful for the volunteer. Below are some suggestions for getting volunteers started.

#### One to one chat or discussion

- People could be offered written information, followed by an opportunity to meet to discuss and clarify.

#### Group sessions

- These can be useful when a person starts a volunteering role.
- As well as using sessions during induction training, they can be helpful for ongoing development or building a team.

#### Starting the role alongside another volunteer

- 'Buddying' a new volunteer with an established volunteer can help ease a new volunteer into a role and help develop an existing volunteer.

#### A trial opportunity or period

- This can give someone the chance to try a role so that both you and they can see whether it suits them.
- If you do have a trial period, make sure that it's clear when it has ended so that the volunteer knows they are now considered to be an established part of the team – this is a chance to affirm them.

**Alongside a role description, a mutual expectations document can clarify the expectations of a mutually beneficial relationship right from the outset.**

See a [Mutual expectations template](#) for a sample to adapt.



### **Ongoing support and development**

For those undertaking specific roles over a longer period of time, more formal developmental opportunities could be appropriate, but some approaches will be less formal than others.

In some organisations, including churches, there are roles where people are familiar with a pattern of “front loading” training for a role, and then authorising (e.g. commissioning, licensing or ordaining) them to do it. This can mean that ongoing development, training and support may be given less attention than could be valuable for the volunteer’s ongoing development.

### **Meetings with individuals or a group where you review how things are going**

- These can include opportunities to report back or discuss ways in which shared tasks can be improved, and ask questions.
- These gatherings could be formal, or semi-social and involve a meal.

### **Having a mentor**

- Various definitions exist for mentor or buddy so make sure that understandings are shared.

### **Team gatherings with a training focus**

- This might be formal training or a session to discuss specific questions or look at a case study.

### **Finding specialist expertise to help people do the role and develop**

- Think about other organisations or partners who offer opportunities for training (e.g. volunteer bureaux or organisations with specific expertise).
- Training could be offered to participants from organisations or projects together.
- Training offered to volunteers has to be relevant to their role otherwise it can be seen as a form of payment.

### **Arranging a visit or short term placement**

- This could help a volunteer see how a similar task is undertaken in a different place or context.

### **Arranging formal task-focussed supervision from a specialist**

- This will be particularly important for certain roles that may be undertaken by volunteers, e.g. counselling.

### **A regular review (e.g. annually) with each volunteer**

- There is huge value for everyone in having a recognised opportunity to ask specific questions, and identify ongoing development opportunities.
- This can be a useful opportunity for you to discover how things are going and draw out responses you might not have expected.

### **In churches, taking time out together for theological discussion and reflection**

- This can give volunteers an opportunity to consider how the work being done is rooted in particular values and beliefs.



# 8

## Tackling difficulties

Organisations experience moments when things are misunderstood, assumptions are not shared or there are differing views of what the best future looks like.

Sometimes these differences will be relatively minor and easy to resolve, sometimes they will require more conscious interventions.

### STARTING POINTS

There are some particular things that it's helpful to remember when working to minimise or resolve differences with volunteers:

#### Challenges will arise

- No human being is perfect so some challenges are inevitable.

#### Keep the purpose central

- What you are doing has a purpose – the purpose of the organisation as a whole and of a particular task.

#### Set up volunteer roles in a clear way

- This can minimise problems that arise, as well as giving a better foundation for dealing with those that do.

#### Be alert to issues as they emerge

- This can help you find simple ways forward before things get out of hand.

#### People vary enormously

- Even when you remember and act on all the points mentioned, you won't be able to control every volunteer's reaction.
- Sometimes a reasonable, considered way forward will still not satisfy everyone and sometimes it's right to decide that the task takes precedence over keeping everyone happy.

### PRACTICALITIES

Coping with differences and challenges encompasses both trying to avoid unnecessary problems and dealing with them when they arise. Below are some suggestions for both situations.

#### Avoiding problems

**This is mostly about setting things up clearly.**

It is also useful to be aware of assumptions that you or the volunteer may have. Different organisations and projects have often evolved varied approaches that may deal with local priorities or challenges that have arisen in that specific place. It is better not to assume that everyone will automatically know and

understand your local patterns. Giving people an early opportunity to raise issues and questions is helpful.

#### IT IS IMPORTANT FOR A NEW VOLUNTEER TO:

- know what they are doing and why
- know who is responsible for offering guidance and support
- know and understands the current systems and any relevant guidance or procedures
- know how to raise questions and make suggestions

In a more formal situation with volunteers, clarity is aided by things like volunteer role descriptions (see our [Sample volunteer role description](#), a simple document that outlines mutual expectations (see our [Mutual expectations template](#) and an induction. These enable everyone to be aware of what is being done, why and how.

#### Tackling challenges that arise

**Once you have set things up clearly, addressing issues is often about listening and responding positively when it is apparent that systems or relationships are not working as well as they might.**

If you work fairly formally with volunteers it can be worth having an agreed process to work through, that starts with an informal chat but shows ways forward to a more formalised resolution, including, if necessary, asking a volunteer not to continue in a particular role. Different approaches could be more appropriate in a parish church context, for example using mediation, but for an example of a simple but formal problem solving procedure see our [Problem solving procedure template](#).

#### The following informal process can be useful for working through issues:

**Listen** – attentively to the people involved.

**Respond** – positively to the people involved.

**Reflect** – on what they have said and what impact their comments and suggestions might have on how you do things and on other people involved.

**Consult** – if necessary. Will others be affected by this? Who do you need to consult so that a final decision is positively accepted? (And avoid just asking 'favourites' what they think).

**Decide** – is the decision yours or someone else's? What is the response to the suggestion or complaint? You don't have to agree with every suggestion or complaint but you do need to decide a way forward.

**Communicate** – the decision and the reasons to the individual and to others who have been involved.

See [A case study of a volunteer not following guidance given](#).

## Tackling Specific Difficulties

**When differences arise, there are almost limitless options for finding a way forward: the ideas below are just some suggestions. You will know your volunteers best and what works with one person or group might be something you would never do with another.**

It is helpful for work with volunteers to include opportunities for open and honest conversation, which offers you the chance to notice, hear and reflect on what is happening.

### Volunteer not doing what they were asked to do

- Notice what they are doing. Compliment them on the things they are doing well. Ask them about anything that they aren't doing – and take it from there.
- If they have a role description – or similar – then you can review that with them to find out what they enjoy doing and what they don't.
- Are they in the right role? Could they try a different role or could this role be adapted to suit them better?
- Is there some additional support they may need to be able to fulfil the role?

### Volunteer is operating in a way that isn't working

(e.g. not turning up when expected, not operating cooperatively, not doing the things that are part of their role, etc.)

**'How are things?'** – Check if the person is enjoying the role. Start with a completely open question and if that doesn't elicit an answer then possibly give an indication of why you were concerned about them.

**Work out what the problem is** – Swap the rota around so that you or someone else can do some sessions alongside the person to learn more about what is going on.

**Additional support/training** – Arrange for them to shadow someone else to learn more about the role.

**Group sessions** – A session with all volunteers to consider why the task is important will not focus criticism on one individual and can enable all volunteers to share ideas of how to make things work well.

**Refer to the role description or a mutual expectations document** if you have one. This could help you to have a conversation about expectations in the role.

### Volunteer constantly negative

- Are they alright? Are there other things going on for them – do they need a bit more individual attention?
- Meet and ask them about whether they enjoy the role – this may be done informally over a cup of tea. You may discover that they do enjoy it! You can then explore what things frustrate them and whether they are things that can be changed or not. It may be that they would prefer another role and that this one isn't working for them anymore.
- Sometimes some dedicated time really listening to them can defuse things and help put relationships on a more positive footing.
- Sometimes it's worth explicitly reminding volunteers to come to you with problems so that you can help with a solution rather than people grumbling to one another.

### Relatively new volunteer makes a suggestion about something that could be done differently

- Try the **Listen, Respond, Reflect, Consult, Decide and Communicate** process.
- If it's simple and uncontroversial and you think it might make a positive improvement, making suggested changes demonstrates that you value your volunteers and their views.
- If you think the idea needs more thought then you could let the volunteer know that you'll ensure there is an opportunity to raise it in the next meeting if appropriate. There could then be an open discussion, allowing all volunteers to share their views.

### Volunteers not being welcoming to a new volunteer

- Ask the 'unfriendly' volunteer how they think the new person is getting on. This can then lead into a conversation where you have a chance to affirm how important it is to help someone settle in, be able to ask questions, feel part of the team, etc.
- Consider whether you could have a meeting/training session where you get the volunteers together and include activities that split people into groups/pairs and give opportunities for new volunteer to contribute in a structured environment.
- Possibly have a social session where volunteers have a chance to get together.

### A new volunteer has experience from another place but the existing volunteers appear to feel threatened

- Talk to the volunteer about why some of their suggestions worked in that other place – spend time listening attentively and also help them reflect about how the new context might be different – taking it seriously but helping them to analyse and recognise the differences.
- Look at the rota. Find someone confident and well established and pair them up so that the new volunteer can be affirmed by someone who doesn't feel threatened and the established volunteer can help the new volunteer settle into the different context and tease out which ideas might transfer and which might not.

### **A volunteer with a strong personality is becoming dominant in the group**

- Actively look for opportunities to ask others in the group to take a lead.
- Re-establish the parity of the group. Perhaps in a meeting or event that gets feedback, ensuring that whatever questions are asked of the group you then take feedback in a structured way that gives everyone a chance to speak rather than defaulting to the usual suspects.

### **A volunteer in a public role talks about people negatively and audibly**

(e.g. at a Drop-in or welcoming people to activities)

- If you are around when it happens then a clear look or a gentle comment might be enough to highlight that the volunteer has strayed away from their role. You need to judge whether this has hit home though.  
'I was surprised to hear...' could be a good opener for a conversation.
- Find the chance (or pre-arrange it) to have a chat directly with that volunteer. Make them aware that you have heard them making comments, refer them back to the purpose of the role and make it clear that negative judgements are not part of that – and why.

**If you have suggestions of other common scenarios or solutions that you are happy to share, please send to: [amy.page@cuf.org.uk](mailto:amy.page@cuf.org.uk)**





For further resources to help you plan, run and evaluate your projects, visit: [cuf.org.uk/resourcehub](https://cuf.org.uk/resourcehub)

Church Urban Fund, The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London SE11 5RR  
0203 752 5655 | [hello@cuf.org.uk](mailto:hello@cuf.org.uk) | [www.cuf.org.uk](http://www.cuf.org.uk)  
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