

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS



6b. Volunteer care expenses

Why should an organisation reimburse a volunteer's care expenses?

Reimbursing expenses is an important way of demonstrating your organisation's commitment to equal opportunities. It helps to reduce potential financial barriers to new and current volunteers. It also demonstrates that your organisation values your volunteers' time, and doesn't want them to be out of pocket for their contribution.

Research by the Institute for Volunteering Research has shown that volunteers with lower incomes can often find it more difficult to afford to volunteer. Offering to reimburse care costs could be a particularly welcoming gesture to a parent or carer who finds it difficult to step out of their daily routine, or who simply can't afford to. Above all, it could help your organisation to support a new source of valuable and committed volunteers.

How much can be reimbursed?

As with reimbursing all other types of expenses, the best principle is to cover the actual cost incurred by the volunteer. It is good practice to ask volunteers to complete an expenses record form and to submit receipts for anything they are claiming for. An example expenses form is appended to this chapter.

The Department of Work and Pensions accepts that care costs are a reasonable expense incurred through volunteering. The DWP Decision Maker's Guide for advisors includes a note on volunteer expenses as follows: "The expenses may be for personal incidental expenses resulting from the person being a voluntary worker, for example travelling expenses or child care costs."

If any of your volunteers are receiving a state benefit, (such as Jobseekers' Allowance or Incapacity Benefit), you should give them a copy of the expenses record form and receipts so they can show it to their Benefits Advisor. It's also helpful to remind any new volunteers claiming state benefits that they should inform their Jobcentre advisor before they begin volunteering and let them know about any expenses claimed.

Please note that volunteers' childcare costs cannot be covered through the national employer-supported childcare voucher scheme, because it is designed to allow employees to pay for childcare through pre-tax income.

What kinds of care costs could be reimbursed?

Children

There is a range of options in the UK, from childminding, private nursery and crèche places to local babysitting. While it is ultimately a parent's right and responsibility to choose suitable care for their child, some organisations have worries, preferences or statutory guidelines over certain forms of childcare.

Technically speaking, childcare can be divided into "formal" provision and "informal" provision. Your organisation may decide to only cover the costs of a "formal" childcare provider or a registered childminder. Alternatively, you might be happy to reimburse other types of "informal" childcare expenses such as babysitting fees.

When making your decision, there are many factors to consider:

- Some organisations are only allowed to use their funding to cover formal childcare which is given by a registered provider.
- Some people believe that informal babysitting does not offer the best or most stimulating education and care for a child on a regular basis. This consideration might be particularly relevant for an organisation which works in the children's or youth sector and wants to set a volunteer policy which is consistent with its wider principles.
- Others can feel reluctant to reimburse babysitting costs because it is regarded as a more unofficial method or because babysitters are often family members or close friends of the volunteer.
- Alternatively, informal childcare might be more practical for a volunteer in certain situations. For example, it could be the simplest option for a new volunteer who needs time to come for an informal interview and try out their new role for a few weeks.
- Or indeed, some children might react better to spending time with a local and well-loved babysitter, than joining a new crèche.

You may decide to adopt clear criteria on whether your organisation will cover both formal and informal childcare costs, or you may decide that it is better to discuss each case with each individual volunteer.

Adult dependents

The Department of Work and Pensions' booklet called "A Guide to Volunteering on benefits" says that "Volunteering within the UK shouldn't affect your Carer's Allowance, as long as you are still caring for a disabled person, who is getting a qualifying benefit, for at least 35 hours a week".

If your organisation is considering reimbursing any care costs to a volunteer who receives Carer's Allowance, we strongly recommend that volunteers check this with their Benefits Advisor in advance to make sure that they will still meet the requirement of 35 hours per week.

Accepting volunteers' children into your organisation's crèche

This may be a tricky question for some organisations, because it raises questions about professional boundaries. Some crèches prefer not to accept children of volunteers or staff, because of worries about a potential conflict of interest. For example, how would your crèche deal with any problems between a client's child and a volunteer's child?

Some organisations prefer not to create a relationship with their volunteers on multiple levels; for example, by working with them as volunteers and simultaneously providing a care service to their children. Other crèches may have limited capacity, and therefore not be able to provide a place for a regular volunteer. Equally, some organisations recognise the convenience for their volunteers of being able to volunteer and find childcare in the same place, and decide that offering crèche places is an important part of removing potential barriers to volunteering.

Ultimately, it is entirely your organisation's choice, but the key thing is to deal fairly with each volunteer and to be consistent.

Estimating care costs or finding out what is reasonable in your area

If you want to begin reimbursing care costs but aren't sure whether your volunteer expenses budget will stretch, you can do some research into costs in your area.

Children

The ChildcareLink website helps you to search for childminders, crèches, nurseries and playgroups by local town or postcode. It provides contact details and some of the entries also give cost estimates. The website address is <http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk> or alternatively you can be connected to your local information service by calling them freephone on 0800 2 346346.

Adult dependents

The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) website has a [directory to search for care services](#) by postcode or local authority. The website also includes advice for anyone looking for care services for the first time. You can contact CSCI directly on their helpline on 0845 015 0120 or 0191 233 3323 or by email at enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk.

Planning your volunteer budget

If your organisation hasn't reimbursed volunteer care expenses before, you will need to plan ahead and set money aside. When preparing your volunteer programme budget, you need to estimate how many volunteers will need their care expenses reimbursed and how often this will be. This may not be easy at first, so don't panic!

If you need to find out how many of your current volunteers have caring responsibilities, remember to do this sensitively. Obviously, you don't want to get anyone's hopes up during the planning stage, in case you decide that you can't afford to start reimbursing care expenses. If none of your volunteers care for a child or dependent adult, you may have spotted an important gap in your expenses policy! Your local Volunteer Centre might be able to give you advice on the number of potential volunteers who approach them and want opportunities which reimburse care expenses or offer particular hours which suit their caring commitments.

When you are planning your budget, consider what you will tell volunteers in advance.

- Ideally you should clearly advertise in recruitment materials that all reasonable expenses are reimbursed. This means that potential volunteers don't have to ask, or aren't put off because they are too scared to ask.
- But for organisations with a limited budget, it would be wise to introduce your new provision for care expenses gradually and not advertise too widely so that you don't raise expectations in the local area.

Alternatives to reimbursing care costs

If your organisation doesn't have the budget to consider reimbursing care costs to volunteers, a volunteer co-ordinator can offer support in many other ways. One example is exploring the possibility of adapting a volunteer role or the times of a volunteering opportunity to fit someone's caring commitments. A new volunteer might feel reluctant to ask, so try to take a proactive approach in asking about this during the recruitment process.

Seeking funding

If your organisation recognises a need and intends to begin reimbursing care costs in the future, you could include this as an aspiration in your volunteer policy or strategy..

Appendix 1 – Volunteer Expenses Claim Form

Example Volunteer Expenses Claim Form

This form is to be used to record those expenses you incur while volunteering for **Charity Name** for which you wish to be reimbursed. The types of expenditure for which we provide reimbursement are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Date	Type of Expense	Amount

Total

Expenses will be reimbursed on demand, but claims for periods exceeding a calendar month will not be considered. Please remember to keep receipts, bus tickets etc.

These represent an accurate account of my expenses.

Name of volunteer

Authorised by

Signature

Date