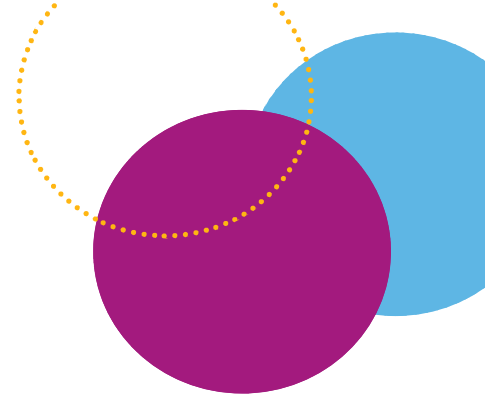


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What is volunteering?



There is no single legal definition of what volunteering actually is or what types of activity it includes. Amongst the various definitions that may be used there are some common themes - things like choice, non-payment and community benefit.

Volunteering is defined in the Volunteering Compact Code of Good Practice as:

“...an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives.”

The Code also says that volunteering is:

“... the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community, and can take many forms. It is freely undertaken and not for financial gain.”

It highlights four principles fundamental to volunteering:

Choice: Freedom to volunteer also means freedom not to become involved.

Diversity: Volunteering should be open to all, no matter what their background, race, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

Mutual Benefit: Volunteers offer their time unwaged, but they should benefit in other ways, such as gaining a sense of achievement, having fun, learning new skills etc.

Recognition: Recognition of the value of the contribution of volunteers is fundamental. This includes recognising the contribution to the organisation, the community, the social economy and wider social objectives.

The Volunteering Code, revised 2005 www.thecompact.org.uk

The United Nations has also identified key characteristics of volunteering, which can be summarised as:

- It is not undertaken primarily for financial reward
- It is undertaken voluntarily, according to the individual's own free will
- It is of benefit to someone other than the volunteer, or to society at large, although it is recognised that volunteering brings significant benefit to the volunteer as well.

Summarised from United Nations Volunteers Report
prepared for the UN General Assembly Special Session on Social Development,
Geneva, February 2001