

Volunteer Recruitment Policy & Procedure

Public

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Adjoining or Referenced Policies, Procedures, Guidance
Volunteering Policy
Support for self-disclosure of a criminal record
Volunteer Privacy Notice
SIG Feedback (Complaints and Compliments) Policy

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1. Accessibility

At Social Interest Group (SIG), we are keen that everyone has equitable access to our policies and procedures as needed. If you need this policy in a different format, please contact the author via volunteering@socialinterestgroup.org.uk

2. Scope and Purpose

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to make sure SIG has the appropriate systems in place to recruit and select volunteers in a fair, consistent and equitable way. It is also important that SIG recruits volunteers with the right skills and attitudes for our roles to enhance the services we provide.

This policy applies to anyone who volunteers with us or wishes to do so. It explains our volunteer recruitment process, how we promote inclusion and set role requirements to ensure the safety and wellbeing of volunteers, residents, and participants. It also provides guidance for staff involved in volunteer recruitment at SIG. It applies to all SIG subsidiaries across all SIG sites.

This policy does not cover the recruitment of SIG trustees or individuals seeking work experience or professional placements.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Volunteer Applicants;

Those who would like to volunteer with us must provide accurate information throughout the recruitment process.

Volunteers;

Responsible for letting us know about any changes in circumstances that might affect their volunteering so that we can work together on solutions.

National Volunteer Manager;

The Volunteer Manager supports the volunteer journey from start to finish. They manage recruitment, welcome calls, role matching, and onboarding once a role is agreed. They make sure the process is fair, inclusive, and focused on the safety and wellbeing of residents, participants, and volunteers.

Service Managers;

Service Managers welcome volunteers for an informal interview, take part in the risk assessment process, and provide ongoing support throughout the volunteering experience.

Heads of Service & Directors;

Heads of Service and Directors will review and approve individual volunteer risk assessments completed during recruitment.

4. Statutory Frameworks

Our volunteer recruitment processes are informed by and compliant with best practice guidance and:

- The Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records (Amendments) Regulations 2013) which establishes the statutory basis for criminal records checks, different levels of check and information to be disclosed as part of these checks.
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 which defines what constitutes '**regulated activity**', made DBS checks mandatory for these roles and established the barred list of people unsuitable to work with children and vulnerable adults.
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (Amendment) (England and Wales) Order 2013 which defines when convictions become spent and do not need to be disclosed except when the role involves regulated activity with children or vulnerable adults.
- Equality Act 2010 which makes it illegal to discriminate based on actual or perceived protected characteristics. SIG is committed to ensuring there is no discrimination within all our processes, including our volunteer recruitment process, and providing equity of access to our volunteering opportunities.

5. Identifying Volunteer Roles

5.1 Role Creation

Volunteer roles at SIG are designed to add value to the work of staff, not replace it. Volunteer roles are significantly different to staff roles in terms of tasks and expectations. Volunteers have the freedom and flexibility to choose when and how much they get involved and may take extended periods of time off. The impact of this must be factored into the creation of the role.

All volunteer roles at SIG have a role description and a risk assessment, which are completed using the templates provided by the National Volunteer Manager and are available on SIG's intranet. The National Volunteer Manager provides guidance and advice on the development of roles and their accompanying risk assessments. All new volunteer role descriptions and risk assessments must be approved by a Director before recruitment can begin.

5.2 Role Requirements

At SIG, many volunteering opportunities involve direct contact with residents and participants who may be in vulnerable circumstances. It is our responsibility to ensure their safety and protect them from anyone who might seek to exploit these vulnerabilities. To support this commitment, all volunteers at SIG are required to provide two character references. In addition, following a risk assessment, the role description for each volunteer role will specify any additional volunteer requirements. These may include vetting (DBS or BPSS checks) and training requirements during onboarding, as well as considerations such as age or gender where appropriate. Social Interest Group uses the DBS eligibility tool to check which DBS check we can undertake for each role in the organisation. This tool can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/find-out-dbs-check>.

Age Requirements

Some volunteer roles at SIG have minimum age requirements due to risks identified during role development. These requirements are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both volunteers and the people we support, and they cannot be adjusted. In line with the Code of Fundraising Practice, volunteers at street collections must be 16 or older. If a Volunteer Applicant is under 18, we will send a letter to their parent or guardian explaining their role and requesting their

consent. There's no upper age limit, but if health or capability becomes a risk to you or others, we may ask you to stop or move to a more suitable role.

Gender Requirements

Some of our services operate as female-only environments due to the nature of the support provided. This approach reflects the specific needs of residents and participants, enabling us to provide the most appropriate support. Roles within these services, both paid and voluntary, are exempt from certain provisions of the Equality Act 2010 under Schedule 9, Part 1, Paragraph 1, and must be filled by women. If this applies to a volunteer role, we'll make it clear in the role description. Outside of these specific cases, we're committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion and welcome volunteers from all backgrounds.

6. The Recruitment Procedure

We welcome applications from volunteers from all parts of the community and will make reasonable adjustments to roles, processes, and training to remove barriers and facilitate inclusion. All personal data collected during recruitment will be stored and processed in line with GDPR. You can find details within our Volunteer Privacy Notice. The stages below summarise the volunteer recruitment journey from your initial application to getting started.

6.1 Application

Volunteer Applicants will usually complete their application online via **SIG's careers site**. Paper and Word document versions of the application are also available by request from **volunteering@socialinterestgroup.org.uk** to facilitate inclusion. You can also contact us for support with completing your application.

Typically, volunteer applications are initially reviewed by the National Volunteer Manager; however, if volunteers are applying for a specific role within a service, the Service Manager will also be involved in this assessment.

Where a Volunteer Applicant is deemed unsuitable based on the initial assessment, they will be notified in writing by the National Volunteer Manager, including a clear and fair reason, and, if appropriate, signposted to other opportunities within the voluntary sector.

6.2 The Welcome Call

The National Volunteer Manager will invite Volunteer Applicants to a Welcome call. This is usually a video call on Teams or WhatsApp, depending on their preference. The purpose of the call is to welcome them to SIG, get to know the Volunteer Applicant's ambitions and motivations and explore available volunteering opportunities. If an opportunity that we discuss sounds like a good way forward, the National Volunteer Manager will organise their Insights Session to find out more and share the role description with the Volunteer Applicant. If the National Volunteer Manager can't identify an available role that matches a Volunteer Applicant's skills, ambitions and availability, then we will decide together to close their application to volunteer.

6.3 Insights Session

The Insights Session is an opportunity for Volunteer Applicants to learn more about the role's context, purpose, practical tasks and expected commitment. It is also an informal interview in which Service Managers who would be supervising to assess whether the Volunteer Applicant has the suitable skills and approach for success in the role. If the volunteer role involves direct contact with residents and participants, the Insights Session must be in person.

Training will be provided for Service Managers hosting an Insights Session, highlighting the differences from staff recruitment and providing a template for discussions based on the skills, approach and availability outlined in the role description.

An Insights Session will usually last 30-45 minutes and includes:

- Confirmation of the Volunteer Applicant's ID
- An introduction to the charity, the context of the service and the difference the volunteering will make.
- An introduction to the tasks and expected commitment of a volunteer in the role.
- An opportunity for Volunteer Applications to ask questions about the role.
- An opportunity for the Service Manager to understand the Volunteer Applicant's skills, experience and motivations to volunteer.
- An opportunity for residents and participants to meet the Volunteer Applicant and get to know them.
- Where the volunteer role involves providing one-to-one support for residents or participants, the Service Manager will organise for the Volunteer Applicant to spend some time together at this stage. It is important that residents and participants have a choice in who supports them, including volunteers. If they choose not to receive support from you, please remember this is not personal, and there can be many reasons for their decision. We appreciate your compassion and understanding, and we will continue working to match you with someone else.

Following the Insights Session, both the Volunteer Applicant and the Service Manager will reflect on the session and decide whether they would like to move forward with the volunteer role. They should both provide their decision and feedback to the National Volunteer Manager within 2 working days of the Insights Session.

Successful Outcome

If both the Volunteer Applicant, Service Manager and resident/ participants (if the volunteer role includes one-to-one support) are happy to move forwards with the volunteer role, the National Volunteer Manager will begin the vetting required for the role.

Unsuccessful Outcome

When a Volunteer Applicant decides they would no longer like to move forward with the role, the National Volunteer Manager will meet with them to discuss whether there are other suitable volunteer roles available. If there are, an Insights Session will be organised for the new role. If there are no suitable volunteer roles available, the National Volunteer Manager will thank the Volunteer Applicant for their time and their application will be closed.

When a Service Manager decides that the Volunteer Applicant is not suitable for the role they have applied for, they must provide a clear and fair reason in writing to the National Volunteer Manager. They will discuss whether reasonable adjustments could be made to the role or additional training provided to facilitate inclusion. If there is no practical way forwards, the National Volunteer Manager will share the outcome and the reason for the decision with the Volunteer Applicant in writing. The Volunteer Applicant can decide whether to apply for a different volunteer role or close their application.

6.4 Required Vetting and Self-Disclosure

References

For most volunteer roles, volunteers will be asked to provide details of two people who are willing to complete a short character reference for the volunteer. Suitable referees will be individuals who have known the Volunteer Applicant for longer than a year. One referee may be a friend, but the second must know them well in a professional, educational or supportive capacity. References from a relative will not be accepted.

If a Volunteer Applicant is struggling to provide references that meet the above criteria, the National Volunteer Manager will exercise discretion and take a risk-based approach to vetting considering the volunteer role they are applying for.

Our Approach to Background Checks

We welcome applications from a wide range of volunteers, including those with criminal records. Having a criminal record will not necessarily prevent an individual from volunteering. Some convictions may require further discussion to understand the context and explore how best to support the individual in their role. We take a trauma-informed approach to all vetting processes, including DBS, BPSS, and any other required checks dependant on the service requirements. We understand these steps can feel worrying or difficult, and may bring up past experiences they may rather not revisit. While we have a legal and ethical obligation to complete these checks, we will work with Volunteer Applicants to make the process as supportive as possible.

We cannot accept DBS checks completed by other organisations. However, if an individual is registered with the DBS Update Service, please let us know, and we can complete our own check through this system.

When to Self-Disclose

If a volunteer role requires a DBS or BPSS check, we'll ask the Volunteer Applicant to tell us about any convictions, cautions, reprimands, or warnings that are not legally protected under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (as amended in 2013). They will have the chance to disclose any unspent convictions before their DBS check is carried out and before signing their volunteer agreement through our Safeguarding and Self-Declaration form. To support Volunteer Applicants with a criminal record, Appendix A includes helpful resources explaining their rights, what they need to declare, and how to do so.

If something changes in relation to a Volunteer Applicant or Volunteer's criminal record, they must let the Service Manager and National Volunteer Manager know. We will have a discussion with the volunteer to complete a risk assessment and inform them of any reasonable adjustments to the role and additional support available to ensure a safe way forward for both the Volunteer and the residents and participants they may come into contact with as part of their role.

Renewals & Role Changes

Where a volunteer position requires a DBS or BPSS check, we will renew the Volunteer's check every three years. If a Volunteer change roles and the new role requires a different level of vetting or training, these must be completed before they start. This process will be monitored by the National Volunteer Manager.

Self-Disclosure, DBS Alerts & Risk Assessments

Where a Volunteer Applicant has disclosed a criminal conviction, caution, reprimand or warning that is not legally protected under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (as amended in 2013), we will have a discussion to understand the context of their offence(s) and how they can be supported in their chosen volunteer role. We know that these conversations can be challenging, and we will do our best to support you through this process. The resources included in Appendix A can help a Volunteer Applicant to prepare for this process.

We will ask the Volunteer Applicant to provide a statement regarding their self-disclosed offence(s) which will form the basis of a risk assessment. Once the DBS or BPSS check is completed, we will match the information received with their statement. In the resulting risk assessment, we will record the risks (both confirmed and perceived), who will be affected and how we might be able to mitigate these risks and facilitate safe inclusion within the volunteer role. The risk assessment must be signed off by the Head of Service and Director before we are able to proceed with their volunteering.

If we are unable to proceed with confidence, we may suggest modifications to the volunteer role or suggest an alternative volunteer role within the organisation. If neither of these are appropriate and satisfactory outcomes for both you and the service then we will not be able to move forwards with their volunteering with us. Final decisions depend on the nature of the offence(s) and the requirements of the volunteer role.

Once completed, the risk assessment will be held on SIG's secure IT systems and will only be accessible by the Volunteer Manager, Service Manager supporting the volunteer and the Head of Service or Director who approved the assessment. Volunteers can expect all staff informed of their criminal history to maintain the strictest confidentiality. Any breach of confidentiality should be raised with the National Volunteer Manager or the People and Culture team. It will be taken extremely seriously and investigated under SIG's Disciplinary Policy.

Disputes with DBS checks

In rare cases, there can be a dispute or disagreement over a DBS check. For example, an individual claims the contents of a DBS certificate do not relate to them, elements of it are incorrect, or that some of their personal information disclosed on the DBS is incorrect. We are unable to communicate with the DBS about this, but we do encourage any individuals in this position to contact the DBS directly as soon as possible. Their contact information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/report-problem-criminal-record-certificate/dispute-a-mistake>.

Referrals to Regulatory Authorities

We have a legal and ethical obligation to report serious concerns regarding our people, including our volunteers. We will consider making a referral to DBS or another regulatory authority or membership body if:

- We have received information that a volunteer involved in regulated activity with children or vulnerable adults may have caused harm or posed a risk of harm.
- We have received information that someone who is barred from working with children or vulnerable adults is attempting to volunteer with these groups.
- We believe that someone has falsified information regarding their DBS or background checks.

6.5 Mandatory Training and Induction

The National Volunteer Manager will ensure that volunteers have completed the mandatory training needed for their roles before they begin. The training that is needed will depend on the volunteer role and context of the service. Modules that are mandatory for all volunteers in a service setting are; safeguarding, professional boundaries, health and safety and data protection and confidentiality. Volunteers may complete their mandatory training online before starting, or they can use our computers to complete it on their first day of volunteering.

As part of the recruitment process, the National Volunteer Manager will work with the Service Manager to create an induction checklist for the new volunteer, identifying any service-specific and role-specific information or procedures that they must be aware of. This checklist will form the basis of their induction session on their first day of volunteering.

6.6 Ready to Get Started

Once a Volunteer Applicant has completed the below, then they are ready to start volunteering:

- Completed their onboarding forms (Health and Disability form and Safeguarding and Declaration form) and any accompanying risk assessments.
- Completed their reference checks.
- Completed their DBS check (if applicable).
- Completed the mandatory training for their role or notified us of their preference to complete this on our computers on their first day.
- Read our Volunteering Policy and signed our Volunteer Agreement to confirm mutual expectations.

Upon completion of onboarding, the National Volunteer Manager will notify the Service Manager, who will then liaise with the Volunteer to arrange a date for their first day of volunteering.

7. Inclusion and Reasonable Adjustments

7.1 Equity Diversity and Inclusion

At SIG, we aim to develop a genuine and meaningful approach to equity, diversity and inclusion and ensure that SIG is an inclusive place to volunteer. Our goal is to create a variety of opportunities that will appeal to a broad range of individuals and reduce barriers to getting involved.

We will clearly outline the skills and personal qualities we are looking for in our volunteer role descriptions and advertisements. These role descriptions will be the foundation of our decision-making around whether a role is the right role for you. These role descriptions are open access and can be downloaded from our volunteering advertisements and shared with you following your Welcome Call and before your Insights Session. We will also offer reasonable adjustments to volunteer roles, including adjustments to tasks, timings, and frequency, to facilitate inclusion while balancing the needs of our services and the outcomes for residents and participants engaging with volunteers.

During onboarding, we ask volunteers to complete our EDI monitoring form. Completing this form is optional. The information provided is kept separate from the application process and is used to inform actions and improvements in our recruitment practices, helping us encourage participation from all parts of the community.

7.2 Volunteers with Lived Experience

We strongly encourage individuals with lived experience of the circumstances faced by our residents and participants to volunteer with us. Their skills and perspectives can help others feel understood and supported on their journey to wellbeing and recovery.

To support others well, individuals need to take care of themselves first. Volunteer Applicants are encouraged to reach out at any point in the recruitment process and beyond to discuss additional support available to them.

Residents or participants currently receiving support within SIG are not eligible to volunteer in the same service where they receive support. This is to maintain clear boundaries between staff, peers, and volunteers. However, they are encouraged to apply for volunteer roles in other SIG services where they are not receiving support.

If a Volunteer Applicant has previously received support in a service, they may be considered for a volunteer role there on a case-by-case basis. The decision will take into account what the individual hopes to gain, the opportunities available, and a completed risk assessment. In most cases, SIG recommends that at least six months have passed since the person last received support, allowing time for progress in their personal journey. Where drug use has been involved, SIG asks for a minimum of two years without drug use before volunteering to protect the individual's recovery.

7.3 Volunteering Under License

Where a Volunteer Applicant is under license, we will take the same risk-based approach as with self-disclosed convictions and cautions. We will also need to include their supervising probation officer in the conversation and gain their agreement that the volunteering tasks are suitable, is not in breach of their license and that this is the right time in their journey to volunteer.

7.4 Reasonable Adjustments Due to Health and Disability

During onboarding, Volunteer Applicants are asked to share information about their health and disabilities they may have. We will also ask for Next of Kin details, which will only be used in an emergency. This helps us make reasonable adjustments needed to the volunteer role to keep volunteers safe and comfortable, understand any risks in the volunteering context and act effectively in an emergency. Please note that not all service environments are suitable for wheelchair users.

If a Volunteer Applicant has complex health conditions or a disability that affects their daily life, we'll work with them to complete a risk assessment. This ensures tasks are suitable and any reasonable adjustments are in place. If a Volunteer Applicant receives paid care or support, we'll include their care team in these conversations to support consistency. If an informal chat doesn't give us enough information, we may seek advice from our occupational health provider through the People and Culture team. Where we determine that a volunteer's needs are too high for us to support them safely and effectively in the role they have applied for, we will always attempt to offer an alternative role.

The information shared will be stored securely on SIG's volunteer data management system and is only accessible by staff who directly supervise the volunteer role.

8. What happens if we can't match a Volunteer Applicant with a role?

At each stage of the recruitment process, either the volunteer, staff, or residents and participants the volunteer will support may decide that the role we are recruiting towards is not the right fit. This could be due to the service's needs, a mismatch between what a Volunteer Applicant hopes to gain from the experience and the activities we can offer, or a mismatch in availability.

If this happens, we will return to the Welcome Call stage and explore whether a different volunteer role might be a better option. If there are no available opportunities that match a Volunteer Applicant's skills, interests, and the needs of the service, we will not be able to take them on as a volunteer at this time. However, we would encourage them to keep an eye out for future adverts in case a suitable role becomes available.

Finding the right role is a two-way conversation, and we will aim to agree together if there are no suitable roles. At the end of the process, we will provide a clear reason in writing to confirm our discussions.

If a Volunteer Applicant disagrees with a recruitment decision, they can make a complaint to any member of staff, through our website, or by post. Their complaint will be handled in line with SIG's Feedback (Complaints and Compliments) Policy.

9. Equity Impact Assessment

EIA Question	Answer and mitigations
Who is affected by this policy?	This policy primarily affects members of the public who wish to volunteer with SIG. It also affects registered volunteers at SIG, staff and residents, participants and members.
Who is intended to benefit and how?	Everyone is intended to benefit from having a clear and accessible volunteer recruitment process and supporting resources to facilitate inclusion.
Could there be a different impact or outcome for some groups?	Yes. This policy provides clarity on reasons why there are requirements for some volunteer roles and how we will facilitate inclusion within the framework of those requirements.
Does this policy / procedure include making decisions based on individual characteristics, needs or circumstances?	Sometimes, particularly based on gender and age. Some of SIG's premises are not wheelchair accessible which creates physical barriers to volunteering for wheelchair users at these services. This policy provides clarity on reasons why there are requirements for some volunteer roles and how we will facilitate inclusion within the framework of those requirements.
Are relations between different groups likely to be affected by what you are doing? Will it favour one group or deny opportunities to others?	It is possible that relationships between SIG staff and residents and participants who wish to volunteer may be affected. This policy aims to provide clarity on the process and facilitate fair and open decision making around volunteer recruitment.
Is there any specific, targeted action to promote equity? Is there a history of unequal outcomes?	We will collect EDI information as part of the volunteer recruitment process to monitor it annually and take informed actions to improve our volunteer recruitment processes, thereby encouraging participation from all parts of the community.

Appendices

Appendix A: Resources to support self-declaration of offence(s)