

Racing2Learn Fact Sheet

Volunteering in British Horseracing

This course is designed to equip you with knowledge and understanding of the basic principles of volunteering within the racing industry. It has been designed by Racing Welfare and Racing Together with support from industry charities and external volunteering expertise.

This course aims to give learners an understanding of how you could make a difference with one of the organisations within the horseracing and thoroughbred breeding industries that has volunteering opportunities.

Learning Objectives

- 1. Gain an overview of volunteering**
- 2. Understand the organisations and their volunteering roles within the industry**
- 3. Recognise and understand the skills needed to be an effective volunteer**
- 4. Recognise the importance of safeguarding**

What is Volunteering?

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) defines volunteering as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives.

Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.

This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation and social action.

Why Volunteer?

Everyone has the right to volunteer and volunteering can have significant benefits for individuals.

Benefits of volunteering can include keeping active, learning something new or just helping others. Volunteering is a fantastic way to spend your spare time and can be an opportunity to learn new skills whilst giving back to a cause that means something to you.

What to look for in a volunteering opportunity

Before signing up to a volunteering opportunity, it is a good idea to decide how much time you are able to give, and what roles you feel you can help with. There are some questions it is advisable to ask the organisation to find out more about what volunteering with them is like.

It is becoming commonplace for employers to provide a yearly allowance for volunteering, where you can use one day of paid leave to volunteer for a cause close to your heart. Find out more from your HR department.

Role Description

Is there a document outlining what your role will be and what is being asked of you as a volunteer? A role description will usually outline the activities you will undertake as a volunteer as well as the time commitment being asked for and if you require a DBS (previously CRB) check, which is a check of your criminal record carried out by the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Examples of volunteer roles include:

- Bucket collectors on racedays and at events
- Charity race day or event support
- Shop/ merchandise assistants
- Social media or other digital support
- Check in and chat volunteers
- Trustee
- Mentor
- And many more...

Induction and training

Will you receive an induction and any training to help you to carry out your volunteering role?

Health and Safety

Has the organisation completed a risk assessment for your role? This is an important part of keeping you safe and does not only apply to physical activities.

Insurance

Has the organisation got sufficient insurance to cover you whilst you are volunteering with them? Induction and training

Support while you volunteer

How will the organisation support you while you volunteer with them? Will you be allocated a volunteer buddy or your manager/volunteer coordinator? This is essential to allow you to discuss your volunteering experience and share any issues or problems you might be facing.

Expenses

If you incur any expenses whilst volunteering, does the organisation have a policy or process in place to reimburse you?

What you are not expected to do

Volunteering is not an internship or work experience. As a volunteer you are not an employee or worker for the charity, you are simply giving your time to help them or their beneficiaries.

What will you gain from volunteering?

Volunteering is an incredibly rewarding way to spend your time and can help you in several ways such as:

- Developing skills and experiences you can mention in your CV and applications.
- Trying out an area of work you might be interested in.
- Helping you feel you are doing something worthwhile.
- Meeting new people and making new contacts.

How to be an effective Volunteer

Here we explain some skills which will help you to be an effective volunteer:

- Confidentiality and GDPR
- Basic Listening Skills
- Understanding Empathy Vs Sympathy
- Understanding Professional Boundaries
- Approaching difficult or challenging situations

Confidentiality

Confidentiality and the understanding of the General Data Protection Regulation is essential to anyone looking to volunteer within the horseracing industry. Being given the opportunity to volunteer means that the organisation is trusting you to abide by the confidentiality agreement. Each organisation will have a confidentiality code about which you will have received guidance. You must abide by this code and work to the specific organisation's code when volunteering.

Below are a few tips:

1. Ensure that any personal information about clients is stored safely. Personal data about organisations or individuals should be stored on a confidential database such as Better Impact or through the database advised by your organisation.
2. Information shared with you in your role as a volunteer should not be openly shared with anyone whilst abiding by the confidentiality code of your organisation.
3. If you are unsure about anything that is raised in conversation with a beneficiary or with your organisation, you should refer to your confidentiality code and follow best practices advised by the organisation on whose behalf you are volunteering.

GDPR

It is paramount that you follow the guidance of your organisation to ensure that you work within the boundaries of the Data Protection Act and the rules implemented through this act, considering the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

Everyone is responsible for ensuring that these rules are adhered to and should be taken incredibly seriously.

Guidance from the government states that you must make sure any information relating to personal data is:

- Used fairly, lawfully and transparently
- Used for specified, explicit purposes
- Used in a way that is adequate, relevant and limited to only what is necessary
- accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date

- Kept for no longer than is necessary
- Handled in a way that ensures appropriate security, including protection against unlawful or unauthorised processing, access, loss, destruction or damage

To keep up to date with the regulations surrounding GDPR [click here](#).

Basic Listening Skills

Surely everyone has listening skills?

The majority of people are born with the ability to listen but to actively listen is a skill that we are all constantly developing.

Good listeners are actively aiming to gain a clear understanding of what the other person is trying to say. They are listening to understand, and not to reply.

In a face-to-face situation, listening is more than what you hear. To be able to listen to a situation actively you should be able to interpret non-verbal cues such as facial expression and physical posture. A general indicator of a client feeling uncomfortable would be fiddling with hands or looking around the room as you speak to them - avoiding eye contact, becoming agitated and not closing conversations.

To effectively listen to a situation means that you inform the speaker that they have been heard and continue to encourage them to share their thoughts.

To encourage the person to continue to share, non-verbal cues are often more effective than speaking. Nodding, making eye contact and smiling are all ways of showing you are actively understanding the person's thoughts.

In a virtual world, where you may be listening to a client over the telephone without the use of non-verbal cues, asking relevant questions or making statements that build the clarity of what the speaker has said shows understanding as well as using occasional words and phrases such as 'yes', 'indeed' and 'mhmm' help to indicate that you are paying attention.

Asking open-ended and appropriate questions is another way of showing you are interested in the conversation.

Sympathy vs Empathy

An understanding of the differences between sympathy and empathy is imperative when volunteering. So what are the main differences between sympathy and empathy?

Having sympathy or taking a sympathetic approach to a situation means that you will feel sorrowful of the situation. Being sympathetic often conveys commiseration and pity, and can often be considered as patronising if used in the wrong context. Sympathy is recognising that someone is feeling one way and sharing that feeling with them.

Empathy takes that understanding of the feeling that someone is having to the next level. To empathise with a situation is to show that you can put yourself in that place where another is standing and show a strong and clear understanding of how they are feeling by identifying with them.

For example, when someone loses a loved one, you feel sad for the person and show sympathy towards that person and their family. Someone has empathy if they can put themselves in the same situation and perceive how the other person is feeling, even if they do not share those feelings.

Professional Boundaries

Professional boundaries are one way of keeping yourself safe.

They are the legal and ethical frameworks that are put in place to protect both beneficiaries and employees to maintain a safe working environment.

Professional boundaries assist volunteers that may be working in close contact with beneficiaries by showing clear guidelines and give structure to the meaning of their role.

These guidelines should be shared with all parties at an introductory stage to ensure they are understood and referred to at a regular occurrence.

In a situation where close relationships or bonds can be formed, all parties must be aware of the importance of keeping themselves safe and the reasoning behind the boundaries.

Each organisation that you volunteer for will have their professional boundaries in place and it is important to fully understand these before committing to the volunteering opportunity.

Below are some tips:

1. From the start, be clear about the relationship that is being formed. Share your aim of the relationship with the beneficiary ensuring they are aware of exactly what the aim of your role is.
2. Explain openly about the policies that are in place with the organisation you are volunteering for, and that you, as well as the beneficiary, both have a clear understanding of them.
3. Make sure the relationship is one-way. You as a volunteer are there to support the needs of the beneficiary and this should be clear to both you and the client from the earliest stage.
4. Explain clearly the time structures that you can work with the beneficiary and ensure that you stick within this framework to ensure consistency.
5. Ensure both yourself and the beneficiary are fully aware that the relationship is professional and should always be viewed in this capacity.

Difficult or Challenging Situations

During your volunteering experience, there may be instances where you will experience the need to carry out difficult conversations in challenging situations.

Speaking with your volunteer manager would be the most appropriate way to address the situation and gain support in doing so.

To effectively manage the difficult conversations, you must have the skill and show empathy and have the confidence to be able to carry out that conversation.

The following four points outline a clear route to take when managing difficult conversations in challenging situations...

Managing emotions - being empathetic

It is vital to be able to be empathetic but to also be able to manage the emotions and ensure that although you are fully aware of the situation and the emotions that come with it, that you are equally able to manage these. It is the responsibility of the volunteer, during a difficult conversation, to be able to manage the emotions whilst ensuring your point is clear to the listener.

Be clear about the issue

Preparation is key. There are two important questions that you should think about before making a difficult conversation. “What is the behaviour that is causing the problem?” And “What is the impact that the behaviour is having on you or the organisation?” It is vitally important that you have clarity of the presenting issue yourself and fully understand exactly what the root of the difficulty is.

Know your objective

What is it exactly that you would like to accomplish with the conversation? It is equally as important that you have a full understanding of what you want to get out of the conversation as well as your key aims and objectives. Once you have decided exactly what you want from the conversation, it is important to think about how the conversation should close and how you envisage the outcome looking and developing going forward. What actions do you want to come from the conversation and what are the potential obstacles?

Be consistent

Your objective must be fair and you must be consistent with your conversation. Treating all beneficiaries as equals will allow you to be consistent with all of the volunteering that you are carrying out. This will not only give your volunteers a clear understanding of their boundaries but will also benefit you when considering the professional boundaries set in the early stages.

Safeguarding

Every organisation that delivers charitable activities **must safeguard volunteers, staff members, beneficiaries and donors.**

Safeguarding is about creating a safe and welcoming environment and ensuring that everyone feels valued and respected.

It is about actively preventing harm, harassment, bullying, abuse and neglect. Being prepared to respond safely when there is a problem is a big part of safeguarding. Although you may feel that there are not any safeguarding concerns within the organisation you are volunteering for, it is imperative to be aware of the issues that you could encounter as part of your role. Specific training about safeguarding should be offered by the organisation you are volunteering for and you should ensure that you follow their safeguarding guidance for best practice.

Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility.

What next?

Find volunteering opportunities: Visit [Careers in Racing's Job Board](#) to find current opportunities