

# Volunteering and the Cost of Living Crisis

## How the Cost of Living crisis may impact volunteering:

Organisations may be more stretched and less able to support their volunteers	Retired volunteers may need to return to work	Volunteers may require expenses when they didn't before	If service users are facing significant hardship, volunteers may find this distressing
Volunteers' mental and physical health may be impacted	Current expense levels may not be enough	Volunteers may be more eager for paid work	Organisations may have to cut back on paid staff who manage and support volunteers
Less budget for reward, recognition and volunteer training	Organisations with less 'immediate need' causes may find it harder to recruit volunteers	Concerns about job substitution	Charities may be under more scrutiny for their policies and expenditure

## Groups most likely to be affected

According to the think tank [Think NPC](#), the following groups are most likely to be affected, many of whom are interested in volunteering or are already doing so:

- Disabled people
- Children and young people
- Older people
- Minority ethnic communities
- Refugees and migrants
- Unpaid carers
- People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Single parents
- Unemployed adults of working age

## **Recruiting volunteers in the Cost of Living crisis**

### **Messaging**

The message you give out to volunteers is always important, especially when money is tight and services are struggling.

Take care to avoid any suggestion of job substitution or exploitation:

- Ask the Volunteering Barnet team for any advice if you are concerned that your opportunities are not genuine volunteering roles.
- Avoid talking about 'work', always say 'volunteering' or 'giving time'.
- Keep job and volunteering opportunities separate.
- Never imply that by volunteering people are guaranteed to get jobs.

### **Microvolunteering**

Microvolunteering and social action volunteering can be good ways to engage people in a low stakes offer. You could offer people opportunities to drop in for an hour or so and do some volunteering – for example, writing Christmas/holiday cards, sorting donations etc. This would also allow people the opportunity to be in a warm space.

### **Corporate volunteering**

You may want to approach companies which offer their employees volunteering days.

## **Managing volunteers in the Cost of Living crisis**

### **Expenses**

- Ensure that the expenses policy and the process of claiming expenses are clear and unambiguous.
- Volunteers may be claiming expenses for the first time – look at your budget and make sure that there is room for this.
- Volunteers giving time from home may have additional expenses. Consider offering expenses to cover costs such as broadband usage.
- Make it clear that you budget for volunteer expenses. Explain that you want volunteers to claim reasonable expenses from you and they won't be taking money away from service users by claiming.

### **Pausing or stopping volunteering**

Some volunteers may be obliged to pause or stop volunteering due to the Cost of Living crisis. They may have to return to work, they may not be able to afford travel or food costs, and they may find that their health has been affected.

- If they would like to return, 'keep the door open' and offer them emailed updates on the team every two months or so.
- Be clear that you will welcome them back should they wish to return.
- Thank them for their volunteering.

### **Supporting volunteers mental and physical health**

- Volunteers who are supporting people who are facing significant hardship are likely to find this challenging.
  - Prepare volunteers during recruitment and induction
  - Consider a check-in/check-out system
  - Signpost to mental health support
  - Have clear processes and procedures in place to support everyone
- Volunteers have a variety of motivations, such as wanting to be in a 'warm space'. This should be handled sensitively and with discretion.
- Make volunteers aware of the support available from the council, government and charities.

### **Resources & further reading**

- [Support from Barnet Council](#)
- [Help for Households](#) from the government
- [How The Cost Of Living Crisis Will Affect Volunteering | Team Kinetic](#)
- [Testing our Resilience: The impact of the cost of living | Volunteer Scotland](#)
- [Three possible implications of the cost of living crisis on volunteering](#)
- [Free training for Communities to respond to emergencies](#)
- [Guidance on creating a warm space](#)
- [Support in London during the Cost of Living Crisis | London Plus](#)
- [Series of guides and information from Charity Excellence](#)
- [Think NPC's guide on Cost of Living crisis](#)
- [Supporting members through the cost of living crisis](#)



Inspiring and supporting volunteering

### **Support from Volunteering Barnet**

We are here to support you as the volunteer centre for Barnet. Get in touch if you have any Cost of Living related volunteer opportunities and we'll support you with recruitment.

- Request a 1 to 1 advice session
- See our [VIO Toolkit](#)
- Sign up to [our newsletter](#) to hear about training

*This information is correct as of November 2023.*