

COWLEY ROAD WORKS: VOLUNTEERS POLICY

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on all aspects of volunteering at Cowley Road Works ("CRW"). It does not constitute a binding contract. This policy should be read in conjunction with other CRW policies and procedures (including Ethical Policy; Equality, Diversity and Harassment Policy; Safeguarding Policy), as well as our definition of volunteering (below), and our mission statement.

Cowley Road Works Background

CRW is a registered charity and our mission is to engage and celebrate our diverse communities through cultural and educational events culminating in an annual Carnival in Oxford.

CRW represents much more than a single day of festivities, as it is part of the glue which brings the local community together with enduring social, learning and economic benefits. Cowley Road Carnival is the culmination of this activity which is manifest in the most vibrant, diverse and free celebration of our community, attracting 50,000 people in 2017.

Carnival strives to be a sustainable, fossil fuel free event and CRW is committed to supporting and using ethical and environmentally friendly goods, services and procedures and to reducing the negative environmental impacts of our activities.

Purpose of Volunteer Policy Document

This policy applies to all volunteers who undertake tasks on behalf and at the direction of CRW.

The CRW Volunteer Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the policy and the procedures in this document are implemented efficiently and effectively. All other staff and volunteers (including Trustees) are expected to facilitate this process.

1. Role of Volunteers at Cowley Road Works

Volunteers are vital to CRW. We recognise that in order to fulfil our mission and to achieve our goals we need to involve volunteers. Therefore, it is desirable that we present a model of good practice in volunteer management so that CRW is well placed to recruit and retain volunteers. It is widely acknowledged that there is a significant shortage of volunteers across Oxfordshire and CRW values those volunteers that give their time and energy to the charity.

CRW has both short-term volunteering opportunities (one-off tasks / event volunteering) and long-term volunteering opportunities (tasks spread over more than one month). We regard volunteers as a valuable resource and encourage volunteers to get involved at all levels of the organisation and within all appropriate activities. We aim to train, support and supervise our volunteers to the best of our abilities, in line with the responsibilities that the volunteer undertakes, and to act quickly and fairly if difficulties arise.

All staff are encouraged to help create meaningful volunteer roles and to assist in recruiting and supporting volunteers that engage with CRW. All volunteers will be offered support from CRW staff relevant to the role they are undertaking for CRW.

Definition of volunteering

We define volunteering as any activity that involves spending unpaid time doing something that aims to support the activity of CRW. Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual which does not routinely involve the obligations associated with an employee relationship. Volunteering may include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation and social action on behalf of CRW. A CRW volunteer must be accepted and enrolled as a volunteer prior to undertaking tasks on behalf of CRW.

We believe that everyone has the right to volunteer and that volunteering can have significant benefits for individuals as well as the organisations or people they support. Volunteers will be given the opportunity to undertake meaningful activities, and offered the chance for full involvement and participation as far as possible and relevant to their role.

Volunteer Roles and time Commitments

Volunteer roles and time commitments are negotiated between the CRW Volunteer Coordinator, or other CRW staff member to whom the volunteer is assigned. The volunteer roles are as flexible as the tasks allow and the voluntary time commitment is never expected to match that of full-time paid staff. However, it should be noted that unscheduled absences can create organisational problems, so when expecting to be absent, volunteers should inform their supervisor as soon as possible, so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Appropriate behaviour

Volunteers are expected to operate within the policies and procedures of CRW and adhere to its ethos. As representatives of the organisation, volunteers are responsible for presenting a positive image of CRW to the outside world.

Representation of Cowley Road Works.

Volunteers must obtain prior approval from the CRW Volunteer Coordinator or Director before undertaking anything that might affect the organisation. This includes, but is not limited to, statements to the press, joint initiatives with other bodies, and agreements involving contractual or financial obligations.

Confidentiality

CRW respects the volunteer's right to privacy and confidentiality. In turn, volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all privileged information to which they are exposed while volunteering with CRW. In line with CRW Safeguarding policy, there may be instances that require volunteers to inform the appropriate CRW Designated Officer if a vulnerable person / perpetrator discloses issues (Child Sexual Exploitation, neglect/abuse, radicalization) to the volunteer. For more information please see the **CRW Safeguarding Policy document**.

Records

Any records maintained on volunteers, including dates and times of service, duties performed, evaluation of performance, etc. will be kept confidential in line with the CRW Confidentiality Policy.

Service at the discretion of Cowley Road Works.

Any voluntary activity that is undertaken is at the discretion of CRW. CRW may, at any time, and for whatever reason, decide to terminate volunteer's relationships with the organisation. Similarly, volunteers may at any time, and for whatever reason, decide to terminate their relationships with CRW. Notice of such decisions should be communicated at the earliest opportunity, preferably in writing.

2. Recruitment

Role descriptions and person specifications

Like paid staff, volunteers require a clear and accurate description of the tasks and responsibilities they are expected to undertake. Prior to any volunteer assignment or recruitment effort, a role description will be developed for each volunteering opportunity. This must include a title of the volunteering role, starting and finishing dates, hours and location of placement, name of supervisor and tasks to be undertaken. If appropriate, a brief person specification may also be drawn up.

For longer term volunteer roles, the role description may be amended in joint agreement with the volunteer and CRW. A copy of the final version must be given to the volunteer before volunteering commences, as it will be used in supervision and evaluation sessions. Role descriptions must define a time limit (no longer than one year) for voluntary involvement, after which time they are reviewed, and updated if appropriate.

Volunteers aged 16 – 18 will be considered, subject to written parental / carer permission.

Applications

Volunteers are recruited on a pro-active basis by the organisation using publicity avenues that are suitable for the roles that need to be filled. Potential volunteers may also apply speculatively. Volunteers are recruited in accordance with the **CRW Equality and Diversity Policy**. All volunteers are required to complete an application form.

Interviews

Where appropriate, applications are short listed and suitable candidates are invited to attend an informal chat with the CRW Volunteer Coordinator and other relevant staff, to ascertain their interest in and suitability for the role they are interested in. Written records of all interviews are kept. All unsuccessful candidates are thanked for applying and encouraged to re-apply for other volunteering opportunities, either current or in the future, where appropriate.

Checks for suitability

If the role requires it, health checks (mental and physical) may be undertaken. Other checks may also be completed (for example, ascertaining professional qualifications, DBS) if deemed a requirement for their role. Volunteers are always warned in advance of the intention to make these checks. If they refuse permission and cannot provide an acceptable reason, they will not be taken on in a role for which these checks are required.

Appointment

Formal appointments are made only after the role description has been agreed and any necessary checks have proved acceptable. No placements are made unless the reasonable and practical requirements of the volunteer and the volunteer's supervisor can be met.

Probation

All longer-term placements (over one month) are subject to an initial trial period of one month. At the end of this period, the CRW Volunteer Coordinator meets with the volunteer to discuss the volunteer's suitability for their role. At this point, volunteers may continue in their current role, be reassigned to a more suitable role, or be asked to leave.

3. Training

Induction

All volunteers receive an induction when they begin volunteering with CRW. This consists of a general introduction to the organisation, as well as a specific orientation on the purposes and requirements of their volunteering role and CRW policies including the following:

- Safeguarding
- Equality, diversity, and harassment policy
- Ethical Policy
- Environmental policy

Training

The training must be appropriate for the demands of the position and the capabilities of the volunteer. Volunteers receive initial and ongoing training as and when relevant or appropriate to their role. The level of training will vary according to the role being undertaken, but is intended to provide the volunteer with the information and skills necessary to perform their tasks well.

4. Supervision

Supervisors

Each volunteer must have a clearly identified supervisor who is responsible for the day-to-day management of that volunteer. This will usually be the CRW Volunteer Coordinator but could be other staff members.

Lines of communication

Good lines of communication should exist formally and informally and should operate in both directions. Volunteers must have access to all appropriate information, memos, materials and meetings relevant to their placements and assignments. Volunteers must be consulted on all decisions that would substantially affect the volunteering that they undertake.

Supervision sessions

Where volunteers are involved in a long term volunteer role they will be offered regular appraisals of their contribution, based on their role descriptions. Supervision sessions take place regularly (target: monthly) between the volunteer and his or her supervisor. These supervision sessions review the performance of the volunteer, suggest any changes in style, seek suggestions from the volunteer on means of enhancing the volunteer's relationship with CRW, convey appreciation to the volunteer and ascertain the continued interest of the volunteer in serving in his or her role. The sessions also serve as an opportunity to plan future tasks.

Volunteers performing a short term role have the right to request a supervision or feedback session where appropriate.

Corrective action

If appropriate, corrective action may be taken following supervision sessions. Examples include providing information and support, offering training for an identified training need where appropriate and possible, the reassignment of a volunteer, or the dismissal of a volunteer.

Dismissal

Volunteers who do not adhere to the organisation's policies and procedures or who fail to perform their volunteer assignments satisfactorily may be subject to dismissal. No volunteers' involvement will be terminated in writing until the volunteer has had an opportunity to discuss the reasons for possible dismissal with their supervisor. Grounds for dismissal include, but are not limited to, the following: gross misconduct, being under the influence of drugs (including alcohol), theft, misuse of equipment and materials, abuse of clients, colleagues and peers, breaches of confidentiality, failure to abide by CRW policies and procedures and failure to complete duties to a satisfactory standard.

Concerns and grievances

If volunteers are not satisfied that issues relating to their volunteering are being handled appropriately through the informal lines of communication, they are entitled to have their concerns reviewed in line with the CRW Problem Solving Procedure.

Exit interviews

All volunteers are offered the opportunity to feedback to CRW on their experience as a volunteer.

Where possible, informal exit interviews are held with long term volunteers who are leaving the organisation, whether that is because they have reached the end of their project, or are leaving for some other reason. Interviews are usually conducted with the volunteer's ex-supervisor and written records are kept. The session should ascertain why the volunteer is leaving, how they found the volunteer experience with CRW, and what suggestions they offer to improve the way the organisation operates. The offer of a personal reference for future employment etc. is made to each volunteer.

5. Support and recognition

Support

CRW endeavours to provide the support necessary to encourage and empower volunteers to make a meaningful contribution and gain significant benefits from their volunteer experience with CRW. Support forms part of the regular supervision sessions and gives volunteers a safe setting in which to express themselves, address concerns and discuss how they feel about volunteering. The CRW Volunteer Coordinator will always try to be available to volunteers who require support in other areas that are affecting their performance.

Recognition

Volunteers provide a unique service to CRW, the benefits of which are difficult to quantify. It is essential that their efforts are recognised and rewarded. CRW staff are responsible for thanking all volunteers informally on a regular basis for the valuable contribution that they make to the organisation. The CRW Volunteer Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that more formalised recognition takes place at key times.

Expenses

Volunteers give their time and skills free of charge, and CRW offers to reimburse any agreed, reasonable out-of-pocket expenses they may incur in the course of undertaking voluntary activity for the charity. The costs of volunteering should never be allowed to discourage those on low incomes. Current rates and procedures for claiming expenses are agreed by the Board of Trustees and publicised to all volunteers. To maintain transparency, volunteers should avoid taking gifts and offers of money, and should direct donations to CRW.

Insurance

Insurance is provided by CRW to cover all volunteers acting on behalf and at the direction of the organisation. Volunteers should seek to ensure they avoid unnecessary risks to themselves or others.

Personal and vocational development

Volunteers are encouraged to develop their skills while involved with the organisation and are assisted into assuming additional and greater responsibilities over time, if they desire this.

Monitoring and evaluation

CRW monitors and evaluates volunteer involvement in the organisation on a regular basis and seeks to make ongoing improvements.

Feedback

Constructive feedback on this document is always welcome, and will be reviewed after 12 months. Feedback must be given to the CRW Volunteer Coordinator who will ensure that it is considered fully.

