

**Volunteering at  
The National Archives  
Handbook for volunteers**



# Foreword

Thank you for choosing to volunteer with The National Archives. We have some amazing volunteers who make a huge contribution to enriching our services and collections, and their invaluable time really does make a difference.

Whether your interest in volunteering with us is in our records, or our work, or for another reason, we hope that you find it a rewarding experience.

This handbook provides you with all of the information that you will need, outlines some of the benefits that you will gain, and our expectations of you as a volunteer. You will receive more detailed information about the project that you will be working on and your role in it. If you have any further questions, please speak to your volunteer supervisor, who will be on hand to support you.

We really do value our volunteers, many of whom have been with us for several years and who continue to champion the experience to others. If you are new to volunteering with us, we hope that you will feel the same.

We look forward to working with you.



**Jeff James**

**Chief Executive and Keeper, The National Archives**



## This handbook gives more detail of how volunteering at The National Archives works, and what you can expect from us.

Arrangements with volunteers depend on trust and mutual understanding, and are not intended to be legally binding.

We aim to be an inclusive organisation where everyone is treated fairly, respectfully and with dignity. Volunteer placements are made on the suitability of the volunteer to carry out the particular role.

You can expect us to:

- Provide you with a clear explanation of what you will be doing and why
- Explain the standards we expect and to encourage you to maintain them
- Provide a named volunteer supervisor who will guide and support you in your role
- Ensure that you are treated with respect and dignity
- Provide a safe working environment
- Provide an induction and any training to help you carry out your volunteering
- Try and resolve fairly any problems and difficulties you may have while you volunteer with us
- Welcome your feedback, good or bad, so that we can improve what we do
- Reimburse you for actual and reasonable expenses incurred, in line with our volunteer policy
- Keep you updated about volunteering opportunities and developments at The National Archives.

In return we ask you to:

- Respect our aims and values
- Perform your volunteering role and project responsibilities as outlined in your volunteer agreement and role description to the best of your ability and to attend all ongoing training required
- Maintain good relations with other volunteers, our staff and our users
- Read and adhere to relevant policies and procedures, brought to your attention in your induction

How much time you give depends on your role, your project and your availability. Regular attendance is important to us so that we can ensure that our activities operate smoothly and efficiently and keep our projects on track to deliver results.

We hope that volunteers will make every effort to attend and arrive on time, but understand that unexpected events may on occasion prevent this from happening. If you are unable to attend on a certain day, please inform your volunteer supervisor as soon as possible so that alternative arrangements can be made.

- Work safely, both for your own sake and others
- Not commit The National Archives to any expenditure other than reasonable travel expenses
- Keep in touch with your volunteer supervisor, informing them if your contact details change
- Give reasonable notice if you are unable to attend so that we can make other arrangements
- Provide regular feedback, including at the end of the project or your time with us.

We recognise that as a volunteer you have offered your time freely, and as a result we will not enforce any obligations that would normally be found in an employment contract. We do not expect volunteers to attend, carry out certain tasks or commit a minimum amount of time, although we expect volunteers to help us planning our projects by making reliable arrangements of attendance with your volunteer supervisor. Likewise we will not provide regular work or payment for any volunteer activity carried out.

We do not place an upper age limit on volunteers because we recognise the valuable contribution made by all of our volunteers. However, we would be irresponsible to permit volunteers to continue beyond a point where volunteering is detrimental to their own or other people's health and safety. For certain tasks and activities we may require a minimum age of 16.

If you have a disability or medical condition, you should disclose this to your volunteer supervisor. This will help us to better ensure your health and safety at work and allow us to consider any reasonable adjustments, such as equipment or support, which you may need to fulfil your role to the best of your ability.

You will be appointed a volunteer supervisor, and we will provide you with their contact details in your volunteer agreement. It is important that you are well-briefed on the role you are to carry out. Your volunteer supervisor ultimately oversees your work and should give you sufficient guidance. We will provide you with a volunteer role description outlining the specific duties of the role.

Volunteering is an exchange, and we hope that your volunteering experience with us will provide you with new skills, experiences and friendships.

As an additional token of our gratitude, you will also receive the following benefits while volunteering with us\*:

- 20% discount on all books and most items from our bookshop
- Subsidised food and drinks from our café
- Free admission to a number of museums and institutions (including Kew Gardens) with your National Archives pass. Your volunteer supervisor will provide you with a full list.

\* These benefits apply to volunteers based on site at The National Archives in Kew – alternative benefits may be offered for online volunteering projects.

We aim to make all new volunteers feel welcome. When you start volunteering with us we will provide you with an induction into The National Archives and the project that you will be working on, so that you have all of the information that you need to carry out your role.

We may also arrange additional training throughout the project as required, for example if you will be handling documents. If you feel that you need any training, please discuss this with your volunteer supervisor.

While you are volunteering with us we aim to provide you with regular opportunities to provide us with feedback on your experiences. This will include regular sessions with your volunteer supervisor, along with an anonymous feedback form from time to time and an annual volunteers survey.

We are committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of our volunteers. We want to make sure that you are aware of and understand the health and safety risks associated with your role. We will provide you with the appropriate information, instruction, supervision and training required to enable you to work safely while volunteering at The National Archives.

As a volunteer you must:

- Take reasonable care of yourself and others
- Follow the health and safety policy and procedures of The National Archives
- Cooperate fully with your supervisor
- Report on any health and safety concerns you may have
- Report any accidents/incidents you have while on the premises.

All reasonable travel expenses will be reimbursed by The National Archives.

However, if your supervisor decides that your travel expenses may exceed the project's budget, they might discuss alternative volunteering arrangements with you.

All expenses must be submitted on the expense claim form provided and submitted on a monthly basis, either by email or in person. Your volunteer supervisor will be able to advise you on the correct procedures.

We will not accept liability for any expenses that result from activities that have not been agreed in advance and cannot guarantee reimbursement for claims that have been made too late.



Volunteering can often improve your job prospects by providing useful work experience and training. You can continue to claim benefits, as long as you do not receive any money for the work you do (not including travel expense claims).

If you are unemployed and claiming Jobseekers Allowance, you should tell your Jobcentre and benefits adviser that you intend to volunteer before starting. Your allowance should not be affected, provided you can show you are still actively seeking paid work, can be contacted quickly about job opportunities, can attend an interview within 48 hours and can start a job within a week. However, please check with your job centre, as The National Archives cannot be held responsible for any losses you may have.

We will ensure that volunteers are covered for insurance purposes in respect of personal injury. The insurance will not cover unauthorised actions or actions outside the volunteering agreement.

We ask all of our volunteers not to bring valuable items to The National Archives – if you do, please be aware that you do so at your own risk.

## Resolving problems

We aim to treat all of our volunteers fairly. If you have any problems concerning any aspect of your voluntary work, please speak to your volunteer supervisor at any time.

If this does not result in a mutually acceptable resolution of the issue, further advice should be sought from the head of department responsible for your project. Your volunteer supervisor will provide you with their details during your induction.

Most of our volunteer work is behind the scenes at The National Archives, in staff areas that cannot normally be accessed by members of the public.

Your project may require you to be security cleared – if this is the case, we will ask you to complete a form and provide various items of identification. Successful checks are usually confirmed within a month, although this occasionally takes longer.

If your project requires access to our IT network and systems, we will ensure that you receive appropriate training to enable you to carry out your role and responsibilities. This will include an element of data security training. Normally we will not provide you with a National Archives email account.

## Confidentiality, copyright and data protection

As a volunteer you may become aware of confidential information about The National Archives, its staff, users and suppliers. You must not disclose this information or use it for your own (or another's) benefit without the consent of the party concerned. This does not prevent disclosure once the information is in the public domain.

We will store and maintain volunteers' personal data with appropriate safeguards for confidentiality. Please inform us of any changes in your personal details so that we can keep our records up to date.

As we are a government department, all the material we create (including catalogue data) is Crown copyright. We ask all of our volunteers to assign to the Crown the rights of any material they have created while volunteering for us, so that it can be freely reused.

## Finishing a project

You can stop volunteering whenever you wish, although we will of course be sorry to lose you! Please give us as much notice as you can, so that we can make alternative arrangements and ensure that the project is not delayed.

At the end of your time as a volunteer, it would be helpful if you would take the time to provide us with some feedback – this will help us improve future volunteer projects. We will ask you to complete an exit survey to gather feedback on the project as a whole, which will help us identify what has worked well and not so well. This feedback will be used to help shape future projects and ensure that they are successful.

Your volunteer supervisor will talk you through the final arrangements.

If your project is coming to an end and you would like to keep volunteering with us, please speak to your supervisor. We are keen to help our volunteers develop new skills and experience, and may be able to identify another project that may be suitable for you.

In line with current legislation, smoking is not permitted within The National Archives' buildings. Designated smoking areas are available; please ask your volunteer supervisor for directions.

You will be able to arrange suitable breaks with your supervisor.

## Volunteering online

This handbook is mainly aimed at volunteers on projects based at The National Archives in Kew, although the same basic principles apply to our online volunteering projects.

Many of our volunteering projects have been designed for people to carry out online, without any need to visit The National Archives in Kew. These vary from adding tags and descriptions to digital copies of our records (such as tagging records in Discovery or commenting on images on Flickr) through to large-scale cataloguing projects.

If you are volunteering online, you will not require security clearance. Most of our online volunteering opportunities can be undertaken at any time, without any need for training or experience - a simple interest in or knowledge of our records can be all that's required.

We hope to offer more online volunteering opportunities on a regular basis; sign up for our free monthly e-newsletter and we'll let you know when they're available.

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