



**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water

Volunteer Policy



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1. Policy Statement

The Canal & River Trust cares for 2000 miles of waterways across England and Wales, a 200-year-old network, with a wide range of historic structures, and many miles of towpaths, free to use and enjoyed by millions of people, bringing communities together, supporting people to live healthier, happier lives and improving personal and societal wellbeing.

At the heart of what we do are thousands of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers, working with us to care for and manage this national treasure. Their contribution to nature, conservation, heritage, customer service, community engagement, and learning across our network is invaluable.

The Volunteer Policy recognises the significant and valuable role believe that Volunteers play in helping achieve our mission and we could not achieve our goals without their hard work. We are incredibly grateful for their support and want to ensure all our volunteers have a safe, rewarding and enjoyable experience. We also recognise that it is important to integrate the work of volunteers with Trust employees so that they work together in a complementary and collaborative way.

This policy is for volunteers recruited by The Trust and colleagues working with those volunteers. It will be provided to all volunteers at the time of their induction with Trust.

Responsibility for this policy is managed by or is delegated to the National Volunteering Team.

1.1 Purpose of this Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for all colleagues and volunteers involved in volunteering at the Canal & River Trust. This policy reflects our commitment to volunteering at the Trust and sets out a framework of procedures and best practice, which we will endeavour to follow when recruiting and working with our volunteers, to ensure that both volunteers' and the Canal & River Trust's expectations are met. The purpose of this policy is to set out the framework for how we engage, support and manage the work of volunteers whilst recognising the voluntary nature of our relationship with volunteers.

This policy should be read in conjunction with our [Volunteer Strategy \(2022-2025\)](#)

This policy applies to any individual who volunteers with the Trust and colleagues who work directly with volunteers.

This policy is supported by the two principal documents:

- Managing our volunteers – Manager's Handbook;
- Mandatory standard - Managing partners health and safety.

1.2 Good Practice

As an organisation that works extensively with volunteers, we have a responsibility to keep up to date to changes in best practice and ensure that these are conveyed appropriately. We are a member of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NVCO). Policy and associated procedures will be reviewed on an annual basis within the Trust governance processes.

1.3 Outcomes

We want volunteers to have the best possible experience whilst volunteering with us. Following this policy and practising its procedures will ensure that volunteers are treated equally, fairly and consistently. Being able to refer to written policy makes sure that decision making processes are clear and transparent. It also helps ensure that everyone concerned understands why volunteers are

involved and what role they have within the charity. We are committed to engage our volunteers in regular communications and feedback/ surveys to monitor their experience, and address and implement any learning. Our ambition is to have checkpoints on the volunteer journey from onboarding to exit.

2. Our Ambition and Principles

2.1 Our Ambition for volunteering

Our ambition is to engage, empower and enable communities and individuals to connect to our waterways by providing meaningful, valuable, and high-quality volunteer opportunities for everyone to be able to participate in if they wish to, that value the difference and impact they make to our waterways and to wellbeing. We want volunteers to feel involved, connected to the charity, by collaborating and developing inclusive, flexible and rewarding volunteering opportunities at the Trust. We are committed to making the Canal & River Trust a great place to volunteer. To ensure volunteers are at the forefront of everything we do, we aim to:

- deliver a diverse mix of volunteer opportunities across customer service, nature, heritage, conservation, supporting maintenance & repair, active participation, wellbeing and learning programmes, working with and welcoming partners and individuals to help us protect, conserve and keep the waterways moving, to champion, and be an ambassador for the Trust and our work on our Canals.
- value every individual offering their time, talent and passion for our waterways.
- ensure that our volunteers understand what we expect from them, and what they can expect from us in return
- deliver a great volunteering experience, supported by clear, effective, fit-for-purpose processes and ways of working, that makes it enjoyable and easy to volunteer with us.

2.2 Our volunteer principles

- Connection to our cause – we will aim to give volunteers a clear purpose and to show how every volunteer is making a difference.
- Clear communication – we will ensure that volunteers are kept up to date with all relevant changes in the organisation and we will ask them for feedback regarding their involvement through Trust Engagement and Pulse surveys and via regular local volunteer engagement and National Volunteering ‘cuppa and connect’ invitations at regular intervals in the year. Volunteers’ feedback will be communicated across the Trust and will provide learning to inform practice and delivery. Localised communication will be delivered through regional forums for engagement and communication, local communication through their task manager, volunteer leader or lead volunteer as appropriate.
- Training opportunities – we will provide an induction, plus safeguarding and health and safety courses as baseline training, relevant to the volunteering opportunity; (if this is a ‘turn up and give it a try’ event, this will form part of the opening discussions launching the event on the day). A more comprehensive induction will be provided for those offering regular volunteering hours. Training will also be provided where specific role requirements are identified. Other learning opportunities will be available. working alongside other colleagues and volunteers. We will provide training and experience to allow volunteers to achieve higher and broader competency levels, as appropriate to meet individuals’ development needs and the aims and desired outcomes of the Trust.
- Competencies – we will ensure that competencies are appropriate, relevant, measured and recorded. They are a benchmark of training and experience and ensure that the Trust and its

stakeholders have confidence that its Volunteers are able to deliver outcomes safely, efficiently and in line with Trust policy.

- ‘Care and belonging’ – we will demonstrate care, as our volunteer’s go through their experience and nurture a sense of belonging. Where a volunteer’s circumstances change, we will put in place the necessary support and resources, where possible, to allow for continued volunteering.
- Recognition – we will acknowledge and value the vital contribution that volunteers make, saying ‘thank you’ both formally and informally. We will recognise through Trust and wider sector awards for volunteering.
- Support – we will provide leadership, coordination at a local level relevant to volunteering activity.
- Equal opportunities – we will welcome volunteers from all backgrounds and will open our opportunities ‘funnel’ widely enabling us to maximise our reach, support accessibility, and to assist the recruitment process for the potential volunteer. We will actively recruit locally to reflect the diversity of the local community.
- Adequate resources – we will ensure volunteers have the necessary resources, tools and materials to carry out their role safely and to a high quality.
- Safety – we will manage the safety of our volunteers in line with our health & safety policies and systems.
- Partnership working - we will actively work in partnership with friends, groups, partners, adopters, community groups and networks.
- Sustainability and value for money – we will ensure that we work as locally as possible, respecting and reflecting the local environment, and we will ensure that we use materials suitable to the location consistent with local assets to ensure sustainability of the canals. This also needs to take account of heritage requirements.

3. Structure

3.1 National volunteering team structure

The National Volunteering Team is made up of the Head of Volunteering, the National Volunteering Development Manager and a business support administrator. The team also supports volunteer roles in administration and advisor roles. The team leads the volunteering strategy across the Trust, providing leadership, guidance, and consistency of process.

3.2 Local Volunteering

Volunteering across the Trust is managed within a task manager structure (under review). The volunteer leader or task manager is responsible for the volunteer opportunity and to support the volunteer journey. A volunteer development co-ordinator (VDC) in each Regional team takes a wider view of volunteer development, seeking to expand volunteer activity and engage new partners for volunteering.

3.3 Trust Volunteers and partner groups

A Trust volunteer is someone who, unpaid and of their own free will, chooses to give their time, energy, skills and expertise to support the Trust in achieving its aims. No payment, other than the reimbursement of agreed out-of-pocket expenses, provision of uniform and PPE (where appropriate) is made by the Trust to people who give their time as volunteers.

Trust volunteers support the charity in a variety of ways, including:

- Supporting, maintaining the towpaths, locks, canals and rivers by using practical skills and assisting customers.
- Educating young people about water safety and the wonders of the waterways.
- Increasing awareness of the Trust, its waterways and responsibilities and brand, through engagement with visitors to Trust sites and facilities.
- Partnering with colleagues, for example by providing administrative support in our offices, helping to deliver strategic projects or supporting and delivering training to volunteers.
- Championing the Trust by helping to spread the word and connecting us with communities and partners.
- Raising funds, for example by helping to run events, promoting the ways to give money and connecting us with their local communities and networks.
- Monitoring and surveying our activity and monitoring our visitors.
- Technical support, such as supporting maintenance.
- Governance and advisory activities.

We expect that both our volunteers and colleagues to live the values of the Trust by being:

- Caring – we care for canals and rivers, for the navigation, history, wildlife and nature, and for the people that use them. This means:
 - Taking responsibility for how your work impacts on how your work impacts on people, our heritage and the environment
 - Being friendly and approachable
 - Treating everyone with respect, as you would want to be treated
 - Not being afraid to challenge inappropriate behaviours
 - Looking out for your own safety and wellbeing, as well as that of your team
 - Supporting your colleagues and being part of a team.
- Open – We're open, we're welcoming, friendly, approachable and honest and we listen. This means:
 - Being honest and clear with people however you communicate with them.
 - Listening to our customers and to others with an interest in the Trust.
 - Taking a lead to build strong relationships with our customers and our communities.
 - Keeping people informed about what you're doing.
 - Not shying away from addressing issues directly.

- Local – we're accessible, we spend time with the communities who we work with, we work with them to find common goals and solutions, we keep things simple. What this means:
 - Working with local partners.
 - Seeking to engage with our local communities, pursuing common goals.
 - Being visible and accessible to customers and partners.
 - Empowering local teams, colleagues, contractors and volunteers to find the right solutions
- Inclusive – we create an environment of warmth and belonging, where everyone is welcome. We collaborate with a diverse range of people to increase impact and thrive. What this means:
 - Approaching relationships with kindness, curiosity and humility.
 - Being honest about what is not right and being brave to ask questions.
 - Being present, connecting with transparency, dignity and respect.
 - Valuing and celebrating difference, encouraging participation from all levels, backgrounds, locations and styles.
 - Spending time with people and communities embracing all they have to offer.
- Excellence – we strive for excellence, we are optimistic and see what is possible, we look for new ways to improve and challenge, change and adapt.

4. Health Safety and Welfare

4.1 Health and safety management

We are committed to the highest standards of health, safety and wellbeing at work for all our colleagues, volunteers, contractors, partners, customers, visitors and neighbours. This is outlined within the Trust Health and Safety Policy Statement.

We will care for the safety of Trust volunteers in the same way as we support colleague safety, and we have a specific policy for managing our partners' safety.

We will offer random voluntary alcohol and drug testing to volunteers, in accordance with our Trust Alcohol and Drug Standard. This is to support our volunteer's safety, when working on behalf of the Trust using machinery or high-risk activity. If a concern arises that a volunteer has misused drugs or alcohol and may be unfit to continue, we will ask the volunteer to stop. A cause test could then be offered, and they would be asked not to continue their volunteering activity until either the outcome of the test, or sufficient evidence of seeking support/ or that this concern was not alcohol or drug related.

4.2. Insurance

The Trust has Employers' Liability cover in place (where volunteers are working directly under the control and direction of the Trust) and Public Liability cover (for other volunteers engaged and under the control of third-party organisations). Also, where a Volunteer has permission to use a Trust Vehicle, Motor Liability cover is provided.

5. Safeguarding

5.1 Safeguarding Policy and Procedures

The Trust believes that all children, young people and vulnerable adults have the right to protection from harm, abuse and exploitation. The Safeguarding Policy will be shared with all volunteers as part of the onboarding process. Clear guidance is shared on the behaviour expected of all colleagues, volunteers and other Trust representatives in all activities with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults. Where the Trust identifies a failure to meet the obligations of the Safeguarding Policy, this may prompt an investigation that may lead to a volunteer being asked to step back from volunteering temporarily or permanently, or some other appropriate action as determined case by case.

Volunteers taking on roles that are eligible for a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, or equivalent, will be required to undertake a relevant check. If required, this will be made clear on the volunteer role description and during the application process. We welcome volunteers from a range of different backgrounds and having a criminal record will not necessarily bar someone from volunteering with us. This will depend on the nature of the position and the circumstances and background of their offence.

The Trust expects partner groups to manage safeguarding of their own members and volunteers.

6. Support

6.1 Training and development

Volunteers may have a valuable set of skills, knowledge and attitudes gained from their education, work, previous volunteering, and life experiences. To help ensure that volunteers are appropriately equipped for their role, each volunteer must undergo the appropriate induction and training process prior to commencing their role, alongside continuous training, where appropriate, whilst volunteering with the Trust.

Each volunteer will be provided with relevant task manager who will provide support, training and development. This may include regular, appropriate and mutually agreed contact. The Trust will also provide appropriate recognition and occasions to celebrate volunteers and their work, on an individual and group basis, according to specific role(s), commitment and length of service.

6.2 Expenses

The Trust provides out of pocket expenses to Trust volunteers, and this can be claimed as outlined in the volunteer expenses guidance. Volunteers are offered support with submitting expenses claims via the online facility within Myvolunteering.

The Trust does not cover individual expenses incurred by partner groups or organisations.

6.3 Workwear

The Trust will make available appropriate workwear and personal protective equipment (PPE) for Trust volunteers to deliver their roles and stay safe. We will benchmark against other organisations.

The Trust may provide high vis waistcoats and PPE, for example life jackets, needed on the day's tasks, supervised by the Trust when working with partner groups. For longer term needs partner groups are required to provide their own workwear and PPE.

6.4 Problem solving and managing concerns

The Trust supports six principles of managing problems, this is outlined within the Managing our Volunteers, Managers Handbook. They are:

- We will be fair and open
- We will take the volunteers views into consideration into any decisions that we make
- We will give volunteers time to consider the complaint against them and present their views
- Every volunteer can request a second opinion once a decision has been made
- We can ask a volunteer to stop volunteering in serious cases
- We will communicate the reasons for any decisions, properly and clearly.

Volunteers can raise a concern or issue directly with their task manager. The Trust will use the same principles to manage the issue raised.

7. Equality, diversity and inclusion

7.1 Our volunteer principles

The Trust is committed to actively building a diverse organisation to reflect the diversity of the local community.

We will welcome volunteers from a variety of backgrounds and will open our opportunities funnel widely enabling us to support accessibility, and to assist the recruitment process for the potential volunteer

The Trust is also committed to equal opportunities at all stages of recruitment, selection and volunteering. Short-listing, interviewing and selection of volunteers will always be carried out without regard to protected characteristics: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. This commitment is reflected throughout the charity's policies and procedures.

The Trust will not condone, accept or ignore any forms of discrimination or unacceptable behaviour.

8. Privacy Policy for Volunteers

8.1 Data protection and confidentiality

The Trust will protect volunteer information in accordance with the relevant data protection legislation including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Data will be held securely and confidentially and will only be accessed by authorised individuals. Please see our Privacy Policy on the website for further information about how we collect, manage and use the personal data of our volunteers. We expect all volunteers to comply with the Trust's Data Protection Policy and associated policies. We hold and process volunteer data under the principle of legitimate interest.

9. The Canal & River Trust charity purpose and objects

Launched in 2012, the charity supports 2000 miles of historic waterways across England and Wales. In addition to caring for the waterways so that they are available for the public to enjoy, the Trust maintains the nations' third largest collection of listed heritage structures, as well as museums, archives, and hundreds of important wildlife sites (taken directly from Charity Commission site).

The objects of any charity are a key part of its constitution. As the Canal & River Trust is a company limited by guarantee its top-level constitutional document is its Articles of Association, most of which deals with governance arrangements.

The Charitable objects of the Trust are set out in the Article 2 as follows:

The Trust's objects are:

- To preserve, protect, operate and manage Inland Waterways for public benefit;
- For navigation;
- For walking on towpaths; and
- For recreation or other leisure-time pursuits of the public interest of their health and social welfare.
- To protect and conserve for public benefit sites, objects and buildings of archaeological, architectural, engineering or historic interest on, in the vicinity of, or otherwise associated with the inland Waterways;
- To further for the public benefit the conservation protection and improvement of the natural environment and landscape of the inland Waterways;
- To promote, facilitate, undertake and assist in, for public benefit, the restoration and improvement of the inland Waterways;
- To promote sustainable development in the vicinity of any inland Waterway for the benefit of the public; in particular by;
- The improvement of the conditions of life in socially and economically disadvantaged communities in such vicinity; and
- The promotion of sustainable means of achieving economic growth and regeneration and the prudent use of natural resources; and
- To further any purpose which is exclusively charitable under the law of England and Wales connected with inland Waterways;

Provided that in each case where the Trust undertakes work in relation to property which it does not own or hold in trust, any private benefit to the owner of the property is merely incidental. Our volunteers are intrinsic to our purpose and objects, increasing our contact with local communities and helping to conserve, maintain and protect the Canals. Caring for these precious blue and green spaces and inspiring others to do the same is a huge task – but working hand in hand with our volunteers is an effective way to achieve our vision and goals.