

How to Organise a Department Volunteering Day



Introduction



Volunteering activities are a great way for your department to bond and work as a team, while doing something positive for the local community. These days give you and your team the opportunity to get out of the office and do something different. This can improve communication between members of your team and give them the opportunity to utilise their skills to benefit others which can increase job satisfaction.

During these department volunteering days, we work with a range of charities, organisations and individuals to help them with projects that they are struggling with. You and your team of volunteers can help them to achieve tasks that they otherwise may be unable to carry out.

This guide should help you to organise your project and make it a real success. Throughout organising your project, you should always bear in mind who your volunteers are. This will help you to ensure that your whole team is included and their needs catered for, as well as maximising their skills to make the biggest difference.

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First steps

So you and some of your team would like to volunteer...what next?

Firstly, you need to judge the interest of your department. If there are only a couple of you who are interested, then there are other ways you can volunteer which may be more appropriate. You also need to think about how many people from your department can have a day out of office at once. The needs of the departments need to be the priority. With some departments it is possible to close down for the day by informing people of the work you will be doing. However for some it may not be possible for this to happen. In which case it is worth considering whether you could split your team over a couple of projects.

Once you have got your group together you need to decide who would like to be the group leader. This is the person who will be the coordinator on the day. This doesn't mean that they have to organise everything, but it means they make sure everything is done to make it a successful day.

For large group projects within a department or school, authorisation will be given by the line manager and a single approval process will be needed. A risk assessment should be signed by all participants and kept for future reference; however participants will not need to fill out individual application forms for these departmental organised projects.

The person in your department who logs holiday and sickness absence on iTrent will need to record the day off as 'volunteering' for every staff member who attends. This is done very simply on the absence reason drop down menu.

Choosing a project

The first thing you need to do is talk to your team and find out their interests. This can help inspire what kind of project you might like to do e.g. conservation, education etc. This might also bring up suggestions of where you would like to do it – if one of your colleagues knows somewhere which needs volunteers then this could be a good option. Outdoor projects are often the easiest to come across and although they may not be the most glamorous, they are fantastic for getting your team working together and having a bit of fun.

Secondly you need to consider the restraints for the project based on your team's needs. Things to think about include timings of your project, accessibility of the location and what kinds of things your team are keen to do. The aim is for your project to include everyone in the group so if you determine these from the beginning it will make it easier to find a project that suits everyone.

Finally, pick a day. It is best to think of a number of dates that you and your group can do to make it easier to find a suitable project. Make sure you leave enough time to organise everything; including finding a project, getting transport and communicating with the organisation. Inform your team of these dates well in advance so they can consider it while booking in future meetings and commitments.

Once you have decided the criteria for the project and the date, it's time to start looking. Your first port of call is the Action EO (actioneo@lsu.co.uk) at Loughborough Students' Union. This person runs many volunteering projects throughout the year for students at the University so they know a lot of places in the local community which may need your help. The more guidance and time you can give them, the easier it will be for them to find you a project.

You can also look for projects yourself. If you know any local groups who may benefit from a team of volunteers, give them a call or send them a message. Places to start include local schools and youth groups, residential homes, community centres, animal shelters or charity groups.

How to prepare for the project

Now you have your project and it is approved by your line manager, there are a few things you need to do to.

Firstly, you will need a risk assessment for the activity you will be doing. The charity should provide this. This needs to be read and signed by all of your volunteers, and kept on record within your department. Please also send details of your project and a copy of the risk assessment to LSU Action (actioneo@lsu.co.uk).

You also need to organise transport to the project. You will need to consider the costs involved when you look at your options. The first option is to meet at the University and travel to the venue as a team by coach/minibus/large taxi. This is good because it ensures everyone gets there at the same time and gives people an opportunity to chat on the way over. It also makes sure that all staff are able to come, even if they don't have a car. This will, of course, create a cost for your department so you will need to talk to your line manager about this. Reliant Coaches (01530 450087) are a good choice if you would like a coach, and ADT (01509 260000) are based within the University and have large taxis if booked in advance. Alternatively, you can car share if enough members of your team are willing to drive. This can often be a lot cheaper, but do make sure that everyone knows the route and arrival time. If your project is in Loughborough, consider walking to the project. It gives you a chance to chat and make the most of a day outdoors, as well as being good for the environment.

Before you go, think about the requirements of your project. If you are working outdoors then you will need to ensure everyone has warm clothes and sensible shoes. Talk to the organisation about the health and safety requirements and refer to your risk assessment to see whether there are any specific requirements for your clothing. Projects including paint, crafts or mud may need old clothes that you don't mind getting dirty. You may also need to bring tools with you to the project. This should only be the case for projects organised through Loughborough Students' Union, so they should be able to lend you any equipment that you need.

You will also need to decide arrangements for lunch. In the past, some departments have decided to go for a pub lunch after volunteering as it is a chance to discuss the day and have a bit of a debrief. If you chose not to do this, make sure everyone in your team brings a packed lunch as not all projects will have a cafe or shop nearby. It may also be a good idea to bring snacks that you can eat on the job if you are planning to be out all day.

The last thing you need to do before your project is to send out the full details to your team. You should include;

- Date and time
- Location (and map)
- Full details of the activity
- Transport arrangements
- Where to meet
- Advised clothing and footwear
- Lunch arrangements
- Any other info to prepare them for the day



On the day

The day of volunteering should be pretty straight forward providing you have prepared for the day. This means that you and your team can enjoy the experience and get the most out of your day in the community.

When you arrive, you will need to make sure that everyone in your team reads and signs the risk assessment before they start volunteering. This will help to keep everyone safe, act as a register for you to make sure everyone made it to the project and to log the hours of volunteering.

When you arrive at the project you will be greeted by the charity or organisation that you will be supporting. It may be beneficial to have a contact number for them in case there are any issues, and a clear meeting place to make sure you can get started. They will give you a briefing about the activity, and then you can get stuck in!

There are a few quick things to consider through the day; including taking lots of pictures through the day and a group photo at the end, providing the organisation and your volunteers are happy for you to do so. This means that you can celebrate your hard work following the day. And finally, if you are travelling by coach or taxi make sure you know what time and where they are meeting you, and leave plenty of time to finish up the project.

If problems arise, firstly speak to the project leader from the organisation. If the project has been organised with Loughborough Students' Union you can also get in touch with VP Action. Of course if there is an emergency then you should call 999, and this should be followed up with the organisation and anyone else involved.

Remember that staff who take part in these volunteering activities are deemed to be representing the University and are therefore bound by its policies and procedures in relation to their conduct and behaviour.

But overall, just get stuck in and enjoy your day!

Celebrating your success

So hopefully you had an enjoyable day of volunteering with your team and you are proud of what you have achieved. Loughborough University is such an influential institution within the town and surrounding area, so the efforts of staff and students go a long way to both help the local community and show how generous and caring the university and its members are.

Make sure your efforts are celebrated by contacting Kiran Beri (k.beri@lboro.ac.uk 222442) to put together an article. Send over your photos, details of the day and a quote about how you found it. This could then be posted on the internal and/or external page for staff, students and the local community to hear what you got up to.



The rest of your department and school will also love to hear about what you got up to, so make sure you put information about the activity onto your departmental news and noticeboards.

Ask your volunteers for feedback on the project and consider; what were the benefits to the organisation or beneficiaries involved? Have you learnt any new skills during the activity? And what have been the benefits to your department from volunteering together? This will be really useful for any future volunteering you would like to organize and to encourage other members of staff to participate.