



Bristol Parks Volunteering Charter

This Charter sets out the 10 key principles for assuring legitimacy and preventing exploitation of staff and volunteers.

Why do we need volunteers?

At the heart of our parks are local communities and volunteers. We want to strengthen the relationship between Bristol Parks and these groups. Volunteering in parks increases community cohesion, health and wellbeing. Volunteers give staff the opportunity to use their skills in a new ways to bring improvements to parks.

Why do we need a Charter?

The key goals are to ensure good relations between staff and volunteers and that other stakeholders have a common understanding of volunteer roles.

The 10 key principles

1. **Any volunteer activity is a freely made choice of the individual.** If there is any compulsion, threat of sanctions or force, then any such activity is not volunteering
2. **Volunteers should receive no financial reward for their time, however out of pocket expenses should be covered;** no one should be prevented from volunteering due to their income
3. **The Volunteer Coordinator will work with staff and volunteers to identify needs, funding opportunities and delivery methods for training/support** to improve collaboration. These will be both on-the-job training and bespoke development opportunities.
4. **Volunteers and paid staff should be able to carry out their duties in safe, secure and healthy environments** that are free from harassment, intimidation, bullying, violence and discrimination. If this behaviour, as identified in the volunteer pledge, is not acted upon, staff reserve the right to remove their support from any volunteer or group
5. **Volunteers should not be used to disguise the effects of non-filled** vacancies or cuts in services. Volunteering is *in addition* to the work paid staff are able to do
6. **Volunteers should not undertake the work of paid staff** during industrial disputes
7. **Volunteers should not be used to reduce contract costs** nor be a replacement for paid staff in competitive tenders or procurement processes. Decisions to include volunteers in projects should always be clearly driven by a desire to increase community involvement, not a desire to cut costs
8. **Volunteers should not be used to bypass minimum wage legislation** nor generate profit for owners
9. **Volunteers and paid staff should be given the opportunity to contribute to the development of volunteering policies,** including the need for policies that resolve any issues or conflicts that may arise. This includes the possibility for more than one group to exist within a



single park, whereby agreement must be reached between staff and volunteers. Volunteers should accept that overall decision making lies with BCC Parks

10. Volunteer roles and activities should be designed and negotiated around the needs and interests of volunteers, involving wider stakeholders. Finding legitimacy and avoiding exploitation depends on mutual trust, collaboration and respect. Volunteers and staff should be given the chance to suggest changes to the way that parks are managed to improve and enhance them. Ideas should be considered seriously and constructive feedback given if the ideas cannot be accepted by BCC Parks.

These activities must fall within the Bristol City Council Park Bylaws. Any activity which does not fall within these will not be permitted. If any individual fails to stop such activities, they will be subject to the Bristol City Council [volunteering policy](#) section on dealing with problems

What do we mean by volunteering?

The values that underpin this charter are:

- Recognising people as assets - not a commodity
- Building on people's skills and experience
- Promoting reciprocity, mutual respect and trust
- Building and supporting strong social networks

The characteristics of volunteering based on the United Nations definition are:

1. **Mutual support/self-organising** - where we meet our shared needs together
2. **Formal service** - normally through third parties with agreed roles and responsibilities and management arrangements
3. **Civic participation and campaigning** - such as youth forums, political movements, and public service decision-making

We use the term 'volunteering' to refer to citizen action in its widest sense; individuals, communities and the council acting together for the common good. It includes the actions, behaviours and attitudes of all park and green space users.

Who is this Charter for?

There are a wide number of stakeholders interested in ensuring good relations between paid staff and volunteers, including;

- Bristol City Council Staff
- Bristol City Council Volunteers
- Bristol City Council Trades Unions and staff representatives



- Volunteer organisations across Bristol
- Funding and procurement agents
- Beneficiaries and communities in Bristol

Where will the Charter be applied?

This Charter may be most relevant to “formal service” volunteering which has parallels to employment such as recruitment, management, induction, written obligations and agreed responsibilities. The Charter is a tool to help remove any ambiguity surrounding how volunteers are to work alongside Parks staff. The most common volunteer experience is not in a formal role and is centered in associational life. Volunteering is about building friendly relations, looking out for each other and coming together to do things with shared goals.

How to use the Charter

- A principles checklist for organisations involving volunteers
- An agenda for negotiations about legitimacy, motivations, and non-discrimination
- An aid for the co-design of volunteer roles
- A tool for conflict resolution and addressing media interest

Support and advice available

Volunteering in Bristol Parks is supported by the Volunteer Coordinator and Bristol Parks' Staff. Contact Ella.Hogg@bristol.gov.uk for further information.