

Supporting sustainable development through volunteering

A good practice guide for Scotland

Volunteering is a powerful way to foster mutually supportive and collaborative relationships with communities and countries across the globe. When it is rooted in mutual respect, and based on equity and empathy, it can make a significant contribution to sustainable development and global citizenship by changing lives. It is also a very positive way to promote self confidence and personal development.

Volunteers have made a long-standing contribution to humanitarian interventions and development internationally, and in particular can help young people better understand the challenges of our interdependent world. But much has changed in recent years, not least through the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate emergency and de-colonisation debates. The McConnell International Foundation recognises that now is a good time to consider what volunteering means in 2024 and beyond, and how we can all work together to build a better world.

This guide sets out the core principles and key elements that may help you shape volunteering activities that are effective, respectful and based on genuine partnership. It has been informed by discussions with the Scottish Government International Development Team as well as individuals and organisations from across the global north and south who have extensive experience in shaping and delivering international volunteering activities. It is also firmly rooted in the principles of the Global Standard for Volunteering for Development, and guided by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the process, we could not have done it without your insight, experience and expertise. We hope you will find it useful as you plan new volunteering opportunities or build on existing programmes.

Rt. Hon Lord Jack McConnell
Chair and founder
The McConnell International Foundation



The McConnell International Foundation supports those who are working to build peace and sustainable development, working with local partners within our priority areas of peace-building, conflict resolution, education and skills development. We fundamentally believe that we can all be agents of sustainable change to build a better world. You can find out more about us at www.mcconnellinternationalfoundation.org



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WHAT WE MEAN BY INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING

- **Global citizenship volunteering for young people** including education trips and school partnerships (a two way process to support young people learn from each other)
- **Social volunteering** making an impact in communities, humanitarian aid, etc with the focus on in-country/regional volunteers
- **Technical volunteering** sharing expertise and capacity building, e.g. IT, medical, scientific, governance, etc

A HUMAN RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

Volunteering, like all development co-operation and technical assistance, should further the realisation of human rights as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.

Learn more here:

www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

THE SIX CORE PRINCIPLES

Do no harm

Activities should be designed and delivered to promote positive change. Organisers must do all they can to prevent or mitigate any negative effects on their host community or their volunteers.

- Be guided by the development needs and priorities of your host organisation, community and country
- Design and deliver projects that promote and project human rights
- Ensure the project respects local cultures, has a sustainable impact and protects the environment

Q&A

- Q. How can I make sure our activities meet the needs of the local community and country?**
- A.** By listening to others about what those needs are. This will include listening to your host organisation and to local and national civil society organisations' views and analysis about what is needed and the best ways of helping. It may also be helpful to read the Scottish Government's international development principles.

Locally led

The development priorities of your host organisation, community and country are paramount and should inform the design and delivery of all volunteering activities.

- Build a strong relationship with your host/partner, embedding local leadership in all activities
- Design volunteer roles that do not take away work from your host communities
- Project success is defined by the host organisation/community

Q&A

- Q. We are planning to build classroom blocks for the school we support. How do we make sure this is locally led?**
- A.** Your partner school should be in charge of all aspects of the project. Your role should be to help with resources, including volunteers, but only working as members of the local team.

Ensure mutual benefit

Volunteering should enrich the lives of both the volunteers and the host community, supporting sustainable development and fostering solidarity.

- Create a project plan with your hosts and ensure the indicators for success are identified by and agreed with them, as well as the volunteers
- Measure the impact of your volunteering activity, to identify impact
- Encourage and support volunteers and hosts to build and maintain online relationships prior to and post in-country activity and explore reciprocal visits

Q&A

- Q. We want to stay in touch with our partners via WhatsApp, but the data costs are too expensive for them, what should we do?**
- A.** Build the cost of data for your partner into your annual budget so that you can communicate with each other. You should also talk with your partners to find out what other communications solutions might be appropriate.

Respect our planet

Volunteering should not contribute to the climate emergency. Choose travel carefully. Be a responsible guest, mindful of the local environment and respect the culture and traditions of the host community.

- Ensure volunteers understand the environmental challenges faced by their hosts on a daily basis, and the long term impact of climate change
- Ask yourself if an in-person visit is really necessary. Explore online or hybrid partnerships and design joint activities that do not require, or minimise air travel. Consider slower, more sustainable forms of travel.

Q&A

- Q. Should we travel to the global South?**
- A.** This is a question that is best answered through dialogue and consultation. In some contexts, face to face interaction is an effective way of learning from each other. But we have a duty to keep air travel to a minimum and to always offset the carbon emissions. [WWF offers responsible travel tips.](#)

Promote equity

Volunteering should be anchored in human rights. Projects should encourage critical thinking about equity and justice and minimise power imbalances. Volunteering opportunities must be available to all, regardless of background.

- Ensure volunteer recruitment is open to all and that no-one is denied a volunteering opportunity because of finance, disability or other constraints.
- Provide volunteers with briefings on the history of their host country and its contemporary challenges, so that they understand the context of global inequity
- Where possible, organise briefings by the host organisation/community in advance of the activity – your hosts are best placed to provide context

Q&A

- Q. How do we make our school trip open to all?**
- A.** Not every family is in a position to raise hundreds of pounds. Raise the cost of the trip as a group, so that every eligible student feels able to take part.

Responsible safeguarding

Organisers must ensure that their activities do not expose anyone to the risk of discrimination, neglect, exploitation, harm and abuse. This applies to an organisation's employees and volunteers, as well as people in communities where they operate.

- Ensure that all relevant policies, procedures and training are in place to mitigate safeguarding risks
- Promote child-safe volunteering in all environments
- Any concerns must be documented and reported to the appropriate authorities

Q&A

- Q. We are not sure if we have the correct safeguarding policies in place?
- A. Use the Global Standard for Volunteering's online tool to check that you are compliant with best practice.

TELLING YOUR STORY

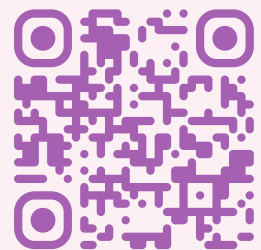
Capturing the successes and challenges of your volunteering activity is an important part of the process. This will show impact, allow continuous learning and inform future activities.

- Use a planning framework which includes success indicators agreed with the host organisation/community
- Work with your host organisation, community and fellow volunteers to find appropriate, respectful and sustainable ways of collecting data about how you are achieving impact together
- Share your findings with local stakeholders, including local government

The Global Standard for Volunteering for Development platform is a free online resource for anyone involved in volunteering for development. It provides:

- The Global Volunteering Standard document for you to download and interact with
- A Learning Library of Good Practice Resources from across the globe – all in one searchable place
- A Self-Assessment Tool to assess, measure and monitor your organisation's good practices, programmes and processes against the Standard.

Set up your free Global Standard account here:



There is a range of resources where you can find out more about sustainable and ethical volunteering

[The International Development Education Association of Scotland \(IDEAS\)](#) is a network involved in Global Citizenship Education

[The NHS Scotland Global Citizenship](#) programme provides useful guidance

[Scotland's International Development Alliance \(SIDA\)](#) is the membership body in Scotland for everyone committed to creating a fairer world

[The Scotland Malawi Partnership](#) promotes people-to-people links between the two countries

[The Scottish Government's International Development](#) work

[VSO International](#) creates lasting change through volunteering

[Volunteer Scotland](#), Scotland's national centre for volunteering