



Foundation for International Education

Volunteering in London

in partnership with



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Introduction

Boundless opportunities exist in London to fill your free-time. Visiting museums, attending performances and events, relaxing in London's green spaces, browsing the markets and shopping districts are among the many options. Volunteering your time at a London-based charity is yet another way to spend some of your out of class time.

FIE has developed a relationship with Kensington & Chelsea Volunteer Centre (K&CVC) in order to assist you with the process of organising volunteer work. This booklet is meant to introduce you to the benefits of volunteerism during your study abroad experience, how you go about organising a volunteer opportunity, what to expect from the experience and what will be expected of you.

If you have any questions about volunteering prior to arrival that you don't find answers for here then please contact Katie Hignett at FIE (not K&CVC) on: khignett@fie.ora.uk

Volunteering and its benefits

Volunteering can be defined as: *commitment of one's free time and energy towards the betterment of society which is done out of choice, not motivated primarily by personal gain and undertaken without expectation of a wage.* Volunteering is a key element to developing good citizens and just societies. It is a means of taking on your share of the responsibility for our local and global communities.

Although it is vital that your motivations are outwardly focused, it is clear that volunteers can gain tremendously from the experience. The experience of volunteering is not just about you *giving*, but also *learning* from and about the individuals with whom you will come into contact. Participating in volunteer work while studying abroad has even greater potential benefits. As a volunteer, you will have the opportunity to:

- Be immersed more fully in London life and culture
- Make personal connections with other volunteers, staff and clients
- Create a unique and independent element to your overseas programme
- Balance the privilege of studying abroad with a contribution to the community
- Raise your awareness of the social landscape and inequities that exist in society
- Develop personally and professionally
- Explore potential career avenues

Preparing to volunteer

Along with FIE and your home institution, you have already done a great deal of preparation for your overseas experience. The preparation for undertaking volunteering while in the UK is no less important and needs to begin before you leave home. There are a number of things to consider and practical steps to take.

It will not be possible to decide definitively whether you will choose to volunteer until you have arrived in London, participated in orientation sessions and received your timetable. Before departure, however, you will want to begin to reflect on the following questions:

- What are my motivations for wanting to volunteer?
- Am I willing to commit my time and efforts to securing volunteer work and sticking with it?
- What sort of organisations and tasks interest me? Are there things that I would prefer not to do?
- What skills and abilities do I possess and how could they benefit a London charity and its clients?

On a practical level, you will need to obtain certain documents to allow you to volunteer once you arrive. You will need to apply for Pre-Entry Clearance (PEC) from the British Consulate in the United States. Applications can be made starting from three months before arrival, please remember to do this well in advance! This is currently required for international students participating in any sort of work or volunteer placement. You will already have received notification regarding applying for PEC in your initial Welcome Email from FIE. That information is available here: http://fie.org.uk/content/upload/documents/PEC_advice.pdf

You will also need to obtain a police check in the US in order to volunteer once abroad. An official letter from a police authority stating that you do not have a criminal record is sufficient. They are normally easy to obtain from your local police department, sheriff's office or campus police. The process, name and cost will vary from state to state, so ask your study abroad advisor if you have any specific questions about obtaining one. *Nevertheless, some organisations require that potential volunteers have resided in the UK for at least three years so that a UK criminal background check can be conducted. Therefore, certain opportunities may be closed to individuals newly arrived to the UK.*

You may wish to bring a current CV (résumé). This is not required, but it may prove useful to demonstrate your interests and skills when discussing the available opportunities with organisations.

Process for organising a volunteer experience

Upon arrival in London, you will be able to begin organising your volunteer experience in earnest. Once you have received your timetable and understand your academic obligations, you should be able to determine when you are available to volunteer.

Your next step is to register with K&CVC. You can do this in person at their office in Ladbrooke Grove, by phone or online. It is best if you make an appointment and go in-person to K&CVC. A volunteer coordinator will match your interests and abilities with charities in need of volunteers and send you a list of matches via post or email.

Next, it is your responsibility to contact the charities to discuss the available opportunity, time commitment, responsibilities involved, etc. Begin with the charity that seems the best fit for you and work through the list as necessary. However, make sure you keep careful track of contacts that you make and follow-through as needed. If an opportunity is offered to you and you choose not to accept it, be certain to politely decline and not leave the contact hanging. Once you have secured an opportunity, you must let K&CVC know. If you are having trouble securing an opportunity and have worked through the initial list provided to you, contact K&CVC for further advising. You will also be put on a mailing list and will receive updates of new opportunities in a weekly email bulletin.



Most charities will expect you to make a commitment of no less than **3 months**. Therefore, you must move quickly to get your volunteer experience organised in the first couple of weeks after arrival!

In person:

Canalside House
383 Ladbrooke
Grove London
W10 5AA

*You can drop by
from Monday to
Friday 10-5pm*

By phone:

020 8960 3722

Online:

[http://www.voluntary
work.org.uk](http://www.voluntarywork.org.uk)

The ten steps to starting your volunteer experience

Pre-departure	STEP 1: Decide if volunteering may be right for you
	STEP 2: Apply for Pre-Entry Clearance (PEC)
	STEP 3: Obtain a police check
	STEP 4: Prepare a CV (résumé)
First two weeks in London	STEP 5: Consider timetable and information provided during orientation
	STEP 6: Register with Kensington and Chelsea Volunteer Centre (K&CVC) in-person, on-line or over the phone (see details on page 2)
	STEP 7: K&CVC sends you a list of several charities (3-5) that fit your interests and skills and are looking for volunteers via email or post
	STEP 8: Make contact with the charity that looks like a best fit for you. They will probably ask to arrange an informal meeting with you. Make sure that you discuss your working hours. If you or the charity decide not to go ahead, return to STEP 7 and contact the next charity on your list.
	STEP 9: Once you have secured a volunteering opportunity, contact K&CVC to inform them. If none of the charities on your original list offer you volunteer work, return to STEP 6 and contact K&CVC for further advising (see page 2)
By week 3	STEP 10: Starting volunteering!

Conduct while volunteering

Sensitivity and confidentiality

Students will be volunteering in a variety of different neighbourhoods and communities. You will likely have co-workers from diverse backgrounds, and your charity may work with individuals from diverse religious or ethnic groups, people with disabilities, children or the elderly. You must be able and willing to deal sensitively with these various constituencies. It is not just about being 'politically correct,' but being able to show empathy and genuinely respecting others, regardless of their differing opinions, background or position in life.

You may also be privy to personal or confidential information about clients with whom the charity works or other sensitive data. This information should be treated with the utmost respect and not shared with friends or others unconnected with the charity.

Make sure that you are aware of how these issues translate into your specific context. If you have questions, please ask.

Professionalism

For some of you, this may be your first work or volunteer experience. It may take some time to become familiar with the norms 'ways of working' of the particular environment in which you are volunteering. Make a concerted effort to understand what is expected of you and comply with the rules and regulations of the organisation.

It is expected that you will conduct yourself in a professional, polite and respectful manner at all times. You are a guest in the UK and an ambassador of the US and your home institution.

Cultural differences

Cultural differences will make volunteering in the UK different from experiences you may have had in the US. London is very multicultural: one in three Londoners is from an ethnic minority, and people in the city speak over 400 languages, a diversity which is reflected in London charities and the work that they do. Learning about different cultures and behaviours is all part of the experience. There is of course no such thing as a typical Briton, but here are a few examples of common variations between British and American society.

Politeness. Politeness is highly valued in British culture. Americans can be perceived as 'rude' to other cultures as politeness operates differently in the US. When in unfamiliar situations, it is best to behave in a formal manner. Being overly enthusiastic, direct or self-promoting may be a turn-off to some Brits.

Humour. The Brits have a unique sense of humour. It is dry, a little sarcastic and often very self-deprecating. Brits will often make fun of themselves or those around them, which can seem strange and offensive. British humour is not intended to be malicious or hurt other people's feelings. It may take you time to get used to this.

The British Reserve. You may find your co-workers are far more reserved than you are used to. They may even appear to be unfriendly. British people can be shy in new situations and it may take some time for you to get acquainted. Don't be afraid to introduce yourself to people, it is often said that once you have a British friend, you have a friend for life. Brits can often seem very formal and 'prim and proper' and while this can often be true, you will also find British people – Londoners in particular – to be very liberal and laid back.

Tea Culture. Tea drinking is a big part of life and making tea is a task that is carried out by all members of staff. Do not be offended if you are asked to make tea for your colleagues as it is not considered a demeaning task. If you are unsure how to make tea, ask your colleagues; they will be pleased to show you. It will be a great way to get acquainted with others.

Pace of Work. You may find the pace of work slower than you are used to. British workers tend to take time out of their day to talk to each other, and building relationships is an important cultural feature. However, this does not necessarily mean that less is achieved.

Frequently asked questions

What kinds of opportunities are available?

There is a wide range of available opportunities. Opportunities include assisting in office administration, fundraising, campaigning, befriending, tutoring, and catering at shelters to name a few.

What sort of commitment is required?

The minimum commitment in most cases is **three months**. In order for charities to benefit from your involvement, this is the length of time you will need to be available. As you are probably only in London for three and a half months at most, you must begin organising your experience right away within the first two weeks after your arrival. The number of hours per week that you must commit will vary dependent upon the opportunities available at the time and on your schedule. There are opportunities available for as little as a few hours per week, and you cannot volunteer for more than 20 hours per week. Do not overcommit yourself as your academics must come first.

Who is ultimately responsible for organising my volunteer experience?

In a word, YOU! FIE and K&CVC are there to provide you information and point you in the right direction. K&CVC will assist you by providing you suitable opportunities and the contact information. However, it is up to *you* to make it happen by following through with the steps listed in this booklet. If you have questions or need more guidance, *do not hesitate to ask*.

Will I incur any expenses while volunteering?

Make sure you discuss this with the charity at the beginning of your experience. If you are expected to travel outside of Zones 1 & 2, you can enquire if the charity can help you with these additional expenses. You may be offered meal expenses, but you should not expect this.

Will I be interviewed?

This will vary depending on the charity that you are approaching. However, in most cases, you can expect to have an informal meeting with the person responsible for volunteers in order for them to understand more about you and for you to understand the work that is available.

Can I leave if I don't like it?

Although a volunteer commitment is just that – voluntary – it must be taken seriously. You are giving of your time, but the charity also must spend time inducting and training you. The decision to begin volunteering must not be taken lightly nor should any decision to end it.

Any new experience (particularly in a foreign country) is bound to be challenging at first. Expect challenges and seek help from staff at the charity to work them out. FIE staff are also here to advise you. Try to be clear about what you are finding difficult and look for solutions. If after discussing your difficulties you still feel you can no longer continue, explain the situation to the person supervising you at the charity. Be polite, be professional, thank them for the opportunity and make sure you hand over any ongoing work. DO NOT

Doing some research?

Check out Kensington & Chelsea Volunteer Centre's website here:

www.voluntarywork.org.uk

You can view a sample of opportunities available

SIMPLY STOP SHOWING UP. People are depending on you, and you are representing your university, FIE and Kensington and Chelsea Volunteer Centre.

How does volunteering differ from an internship or service learning?

At FIE, both internships and service learning are undertaken for academic credit and are therefore a formal part of students' overall London programme. The crucial difference between volunteerism and internships/service learning is that there is a required classroom component and written work associated with achieving learning objectives. There will be more structure in the placement than in many volunteering opportunities, and students must participate in the placement for a set number of days/hours in order to achieve optimal learning and to receive full credit for the experience.

I'm participating in an internship or service learning placement organised by FIE as part of my programme. Can I still volunteer?

Yes, you can still volunteer in your free time, but remember your commitment to your FIE placement and your other academics must take priority. Be careful not to over-commit yourself.

In closing...

Like all aspects of your overseas experience, you will get out of volunteering what you put into it. If you keep an open-mind, approach situations in a flexible and professional manner, you will learn a great deal from the experience!

Contact details:

K&CVC

Address:

Canalside House
383 Ladbroke Grove
London W10 5AA

You can drop by from Monday to Friday 10-5pm

By phone:

020 8960 3722

Online:

<http://www.voluntarywork.org.uk>

FIE

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