

## Sustain's policy on working with volunteers

The purpose of this volunteer policy is to promote the role of volunteers within Sustain. It aims to set out the rights and responsibilities of volunteers and ensure that both Sustain and the person who is volunteering their time benefit from the relationship.

### **What Sustain does, and why our work benefits from volunteers**

*Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming* is a registered charity that advocates food, farming and fishing policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 national public-interest organisations nationally, and hundreds more at regional and local level.

Sustain achieves the aims of our alliance by running a variety of projects and campaigns seeking to improve different aspects of the food system. Each project is different – not only in its subject matter, but also in its activities. Each project is usually run by one or more project officer, whose salaries – as well as project expenses and office costs – are paid for by charitable foundations and donations.

Volunteers are key to the work of Sustain. Each person volunteering for Sustain brings their own background and expertise to help project officers with administrative tasks, research and campaigning.

In return for the generous work of volunteers, Sustain provides experience of working in a food, environment and health focused charity, acquaintance with information and expertise on food and agricultural policy and practice, and networking with project officers, campaigners and related groups. We should also, if appropriate, be able to provide a reference for the volunteer when he or she moves on from Sustain, which may help with future employment or gaining further work experience.

### **Recruitment of volunteers**

Opportunities to volunteer with Sustain are promoted on the Sustain website ([www.sustainweb.org/jobs/](http://www.sustainweb.org/jobs/)), where there is an online application form that helps Sustain to handle queries effectively. Project officers at Sustain are encouraged to check the site regularly and particularly when support is needed for a project.

Sometimes, Sustain projects or campaigns advertise for specific volunteer positions using [newsletters](#), our [Roots to Work](#) website or [environmentjob.co.uk](http://environmentjob.co.uk). For such opportunities, we publish a description of the role, amount of time needed to be dedicated by the volunteer, plus contact details for the project officer.

Project officers may also choose other channels, particularly those that support volunteers that might experience barriers to participation or widen the reach of our volunteer placements. These might include education based schemes or volunteer centres and staff are encouraged to use diverse outlets.

Sustain is often contacted by universities or other schemes that place volunteers to gain short- or longer-term work experience, and we welcome the recruitment of volunteers via these channels.

New volunteer should always be invited to visit the office before he or she is recruited. An invitation to come in and meet with the project officer/coordinator should be explained as a visit or interview, and not as a definite invitation to come and volunteer. This way the project officer is free to assess the potential volunteer's suitability for the role and to manage expectations.

The project officer will act as the volunteer's supervisor and main point of contact during the period the volunteer is with Sustain.

### **A note on use of the word 'intern'**

Following some debate in the sector Sustain has chosen not to use the title 'intern' for recruitment of volunteers. However, we sometimes work with external organisations – such as a college, university or charity running a placement scheme – that uses the word 'internship', usually as part of a scheme supporting people to gain work experience. If a person volunteers for Sustain as part of an internship scheme run by another organisation, then we may use the word 'intern' in this limited circumstance. Such a placement may involve different arrangements for payment of expenses than for Sustain's volunteering opportunities, usually managed by the external organisation.

Sustain does offer paid internships independently. We may occasionally host a paid internship where this is paid for and supported by others. Such a scheme may involve some form of support that varies from the system described in this document – any such variance should be agreed with the intern in advance, usually in discussion with the external organisation organising such placements.

### **Commitment and expectations**

Sustain is extremely grateful to those who willingly offer us their time on a voluntary basis. In order to work most effectively and to manage expectations, Sustain asks the following from people volunteering for us.

We ask all volunteers to:

- Notify their supervisor (usually the project officer on the project or campaign they are volunteering for) if, for any reason, they will not be able to come in at an already agreed time or date.
- Adhere to all reasonable requests or instructions from their supervisor.
- Respect confidentiality where necessary.
- Adhere to all relevant policies and procedures.
- Treat colleagues and contacts with courtesy and respect.
- Let Sustain know of any problems or mistakes that arise so that we can help fix them.

In return, the volunteer can expect from Sustain:

- Equal treatment irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, religion, community background or political beliefs.
- Appropriate support and guidance in undertaking the agreed tasks.
- A nominated supervisor.
- Consideration of any changes to the agreed tasks that better meet the needs of the project, or the skills and expectations of the volunteer.
- An induction to the Sustain office and introduction to other staff and volunteers.
- Adequate training and support for the tasks they are to undertake.
- Prompt payment for all agreed expenses, on provision of relevant receipts.
- Appropriate insurance cover for the work they are required to do.
- A safe working environment.
- Respect and gratitude.

### **Induction and volunteer agreement**

Sustain is a small and friendly office and everyone wishes to make volunteers feel immediately welcome. An induction process can help speed the volunteer's sense of belonging in the office.

Induction of volunteers should follow the **Volunteer Induction Handbook** and include the following:

- Completion of the New Volunteer Form and a discussion of the goals of the volunteer placement.
- A general explanation of how Sustain works – e.g. the different projects, the Council and the Sustain alliance membership.
- A tour of the office and the various facilities such as the kitchen.
- Introduction to members of staff in the office that day and signposting to Sustain staff profile page.
- An explanation of the various office systems – including how to book a desk, answer the phone, use the printer, send post, find the photocopier, put information in the shared diary, etc. The volunteer should receive a sheet with these details to ensure they don't have to remember it all!
- An explanation of the entitlement to expenses, and the process for getting reimbursement.
- Anything else that the volunteer or staff member sees as relevant.

### **Supervision and development**

The project officer supervising the volunteer should catch up with volunteers on a regular basis and it is the responsibility of the Sustain staff member to ensure that this happens regularly and certainly no later than the end of the first month, and at least monthly from then on.

The project officer acting as a supervisor should also work with the volunteer to complete the Volunteer Work Plan template to help manage each placement and ensure that the placement is beneficial, results in satisfying work and provides learning opportunities.

Supervisors should ask the volunteer if there are any projects or campaigns outside of their direct role that they would like to know more about, and facilitate these connections.

After an initial trial period, the supervisor should review with the volunteer if there are activities outside of their daily tasks or projects they would like to get involved with and look at how this might be possible.

### **Access to sensitive data**

Sustain holds a significant amount of personal data, some data that is sensitive or on restricted access for other reasons, and also has a number of ways of publishing information. In order to protect personal data, sensitive data, as well as Sustain's legal requirements and reputation, we ask volunteers to understand that:

- Sustain cannot give volunteers access to passwords that would enable them to access certain systems independently. They must be logged in to our systems by the supervisor or another member of staff. Exceptions can be made when a volunteer has been trained and the supervisor is confident in their abilities.
- Volunteers that are accessing and using personal data are given sufficient supervision and training by their supervisor in how to handle and use this data in line with Sustain's Privacy policy (<https://www.sustainweb.org/home/privacy/>).

### **Expenses**

If the volunteer works five or more hours in one day, he or she is entitled to be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses. Sustain currently offers:

- A maximum of £8 per day for travel expenses
- A maximum of £5 per day for meal expenses (if the hours are worked over the lunch period)

The volunteer must produce a relevant receipt or ticket, along with a completed 'Volunteer Expenses' form.

This allocation is reviewed periodically.

On the rare occasion when volunteers help out with events that may require a bigger commitment – such as an overnight stay – then travel, accommodation and subsistence expenses will be paid for by Sustain.

## **Trial period**

To ensure that the placement is useful for both Sustain and the volunteer, Sustain has a one-month trial period to ensure that the placement is suitable.

At the end of the trial period, a meeting should be held to review the first month to note what has worked, and where there have been challenges. At this point, both Sustain and the volunteer can discuss and agree on what basis to continue or whether it is best to not to continue the placement.

## **Termination of the placement**

Volunteer placements can be terminated by either Sustain or the volunteer themselves. Neither Sustain nor the volunteer needs to provide a reason for the termination and termination can be effective immediately.

## **Ending the placement**

At the end of the placement the volunteer should have the opportunity a final meeting as a way of reviewing the work, handing over any tasks and checking what both the volunteer and Sustain have learnt. The volunteer should also be asked to complete Sustain's survey, which helps us to learn and improve.

## **Support during the placement**

If for any reason the volunteer has any concerns or would like to speak confidentially with anyone other than their supervisor, they should feel free to talk to a member of the senior management team. Other staff becoming aware of any issues arising should direct the volunteer to this opportunity, or make an introduction to help facilitate such a conversation. If for any reason a volunteer has serious concerns about the placement, they should raise their concerns with someone on the senior management team.

## **Monitoring and evaluation**

Project officers should report in their quarterly reports to the management team and Sustain Council of Trustees how many new/existing volunteers they have worked with for the quarter and ensure that all departing volunteers complete the exit survey.

Once a year, Sustain aims to collate and review the results of our volunteer surveys, producing a short report written for discussion at management and staff meetings, and reported to our Council of Trustees, which supports our commitment to doing our best to ensure that all current and future volunteers have a positive experience.

In 2019, we undertook a survey of 32 Sustain people who had recently volunteered for Sustain, to help us understand their experiences and how we might improve. This showed that:

- Over 70% of Sustain volunteers that left were now working or studying in a related field
- 92% of volunteers surveyed agreed their experience either matched or exceeded their expectation
- 75% of candidates agreed that this 'Built my knowledge of key areas of food and farming sector'
- 64% of candidates agreed that this 'Built my confidence working in the sector'
- 57% agreed that volunteering enhanced their skills
- 60% agreed that this helped develop their contacts
- Some provided feedback on areas they found difficult, such as working in isolation; preferring some structure and personal development; and gaining more feedback / involvement in projects.
- Some also provided practical suggestions on issues such as communications, references, computers, opportunities to develop work, and support and connections when volunteers move on.

**Policy updated April 2020 - for internal use and publication on the Sustain website**