

Volunteer Drivers

The issues surrounding volunteer drivers vary depending on whether the vehicle is a car or a minibus (vehicles with a seating capacity of more than 9 count as a minibus). This information sheet covers car drivers. For guidance on the use of minibuses, contact the Community Transport Association (see below for contact details).

Checks on volunteer drivers

- Volunteers should have a full, not provisional, driving licence, preferably without endorsements. You should ask to see the volunteer's driving licence before they start their voluntary work to check that the volunteer does not have any recent or serious driving convictions.
- You may want to set a minimum requirement for driving experience. Try to avoid age discrimination; so long as a younger driver is experienced enough and an older driver is in good health.
- If volunteers will be driving children or other vulnerable adults, your organisation should consider carrying out a criminal record check. (see Criminal Records Bureau factsheet for information on this). As a minimum check you should ask for 2 references for your volunteers.
- Drivers should be asked to sign a declaration about any impairment or illnesses which affect their ability to drive. If they have had a serious or lengthy illness, it is good practice to ask them to bring a certificate or letter from their GP confirming that they are fit to drive.

Vehicle checks

- Cars must have front and rear seatbelts. All passengers should wear seatbelts. In rear seats, the passenger is legally responsible for wearing a seatbelt, (unless they are under 14, in which case the driver is responsible). Drivers should not carry passengers who are not prepared to wear seatbelts unless there are medical grounds for them not doing so.
- You need to be reasonably sure that the vehicle is safe and you should ask to see an MOT certificate if the volunteer's car is over 3

years old.

- Make sure that the vehicle is easy for passengers to get in and out of; sports cars or vans could be unsuitable for taking passengers.

Training

The Community Transport Association recommends that drivers receive specific training if they are going to be transporting elderly or disabled people or children. You might consider offering volunteers training in disability awareness and customer care.

Insurance

(see Insurance factsheet for detailed guidelines on insurance)

It is a legal requirement for vehicle drivers to be appropriately insured. If an organisation owns the vehicles that are used by volunteers, it is responsible for arranging insurance cover. The organisation should also take out public liability insurance.

If a volunteer uses his/her own vehicle then they are responsible for arranging the insurance. Volunteers using their own car must also tell their insurance company that the vehicle is being used for voluntary work (this should not require the payment of any extra premium).

If a driver has an accident during their voluntary work and there is a problem with the insurance for that vehicle (e.g if the volunteer didn't tell their insurers the car was being used for voluntary work and as a result the insurers denied liability) the organisation could be held responsible.

If you are worried about this risk, it is possible to take out a Contingent Liability Policy. This protects organisations against any claims that may arise if a volunteer is involved in a road accident and their insurers deny liability.

If you are unsure about any aspect of insurance you should seek advice from your insurance company.

Tax

The Inland Revenue sets tax-free mileage rates which allows organisations to reimburse the cost of petrol to volunteer drivers. It is fine to reimburse volunteers amounts up to the tax-free

mileage rate. If you are paying above the mileage rate then the volunteers insurance could be invalidated because they could be seen to be making a profit from driving. The tax free mileage rates change each year and you should contact the Inland Revenue for the latest rates. The 2003/2004 rates for cars and vans regardless of engine size are:

- First 10,000 miles 40p per mile
- Over 10,000 miles 25p per mile

Other issues

When drawing up guidelines or carrying out inductions for volunteer drivers you may want to include the following points:

Breaks

If drivers are carrying out long journeys they should rest for at least 15 minutes every 2 hours as well as between journeys.

ID badges

Organisations should consider providing photo IDs for drivers, which should include the name of the organisation and its contact phone number.

Accidents

In the event of an accident, the organisation and the emergency services should be informed immediately.

Clients' illness or injury

If a client falls ill during a journey, then the driver should seek immediate medical help.

Seating capacity

Volunteers should not exceed the seating capacity of a vehicle.

Pets

Pets can be carried with clients at the discretion of the driver. Guide dogs and hearing dogs for the deaf should be taken in the vehicle.

Alcohol

As alcohol remains in the body for a considerable amount of time, drivers should not drink alcohol for at least 12 hours before a journey.

Smoking

You may want to consider having a non-smoking rule for clients and passengers as some people have respiratory problems.

Further information

Community Transport Association Advice Service

Tel: 0161 367 8780

Web: www.communitytransport.com/advice

A code of practice for social car schemes can be downloaded from the website.