Volunteer Policy

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Volunteer Policy

1. Introduction

This policy outlines the principles and guidelines for the recruitment, management, and support of all volunteers at Gilbert White's House & Garden. We believe that volunteers are an invaluable part of our team, bringing unique skills, experiences, and perspectives that are essential to our mission. This document serves as a guide for both volunteers and staff, ensuring a common understanding of roles, responsibilities, and our shared commitment to creating a safe, inclusive, and rewarding volunteering environment.

As a charity, we have the following vision, mission, and values:

Our Vision

To inspire journeys of discovery in the natural world to make better lives for people and the planet.

Our Mission

To create a place where everyone can connect with nature and learn from explorers of the natural world, showing the way to a sustainable future, collaborating widely, and following in the footsteps of Gilbert White, sharing our passion to observe and record nature.

Our Values

The values that will lead our practice in all we do are:

- Being inclusive and welcoming to all,
- Connecting with those who journey in the natural world
- Educational in what we share with others,
- Seeking a sustainable way of doing our work.

2. Definition of a Volunteer

A volunteer is an individual who gives their time and skills freely and by choice, without expectation of financial gain, to support the work of Gilbert White's House & Garden.

The volunteering relationship is non-contractual. It implies no obligation for the volunteer to attend or for the organisation to provide work. Volunteers receive no salary, wage, benefit-in-kind, or remuneration for their time, only the reimbursement of agreed, authorised out-of-pocket expenses. This policy applies to all individuals engaged in volunteering activities on behalf of our organisation.

3. Responsibilities of Gilbert White's House & Garden

This section defines the reciprocal duties and expectations required for a successful volunteering relationship.

The organisation commits to the following responsibilities in managing and supporting our volunteers:

- **Supervision & Support:** To provide support and supervision through a named staff member, ensuring all established organisational procedures and policies are followed. Along with regular informal supervision, an annual check-in provides opportunities for feedback.
- **Training & Safety:** To provide a safe and supportive working environment by offering up-to-date induction and role-specific training to enable volunteers to carry out their duties safely and effectively.
- **Inclusion & Fairness:** To ensure all volunteers are treated fairly and equally to enable full inclusion, adhering to the organisation's Equal Opportunities and Diversity policy.
- **Role Adjustment:** To maintain an open channel for communication, facilitating necessary adjustments, further training, or a change of role should a volunteer express discomfort with any aspect of their current duties.
- **Community Engagement:** To actively involve volunteers in activities that increase and enrich contact with the local and wider community, aligning with the House and Garden's mission.

3.1. Health and Safety for Volunteers

Gilbert White's House & Garden is committed to upholding the highest standards of health and safety for our volunteers.

- **Induction and Training:** All volunteers receive a thorough Health and Safety induction upon starting.
- **Risk Assessment:** Regular and documented risk assessments are carried out for all volunteer roles and tasks.
- **Individual Needs:** We are committed to adjusting tasks and work environments based on individual volunteer needs.
- **Reporting:** Volunteers are required to report all accidents, incidents, and near-misses immediately to their supervisor.
- **Equipment and PPE:** Appropriate and well-maintained Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will be provided where necessary, and volunteers must use it according to their training.

3.2. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All personal details collected from Volunteers through applications, forms, checks, and administrative processes will be treated as confidential and stored in line with the organisation's Data Protection Policy and relevant legislation (including GDPR). This data will only be used for purposes directly related to the volunteer role (e.g., emergency contact, scheduling, training, monitoring EDI commitment).

Intellectual Property

Unless a specific agreement is made in advance, any work, research, text, design, or photographic material created by a volunteer during the scope of their volunteering role at Gilbert White's House & Garden will be deemed the property of the organisation.

3.3. Equal Opportunities and Access

Gilbert White's House & Garden is committed to providing equal opportunities to all individuals involved with our organisation. Following our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Policy, we strive to provide an environment that is free from unfair discrimination. We treat all individuals fairly, regardless of their Protected Characteristics, including gender, race, colour, national origin, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, age, or disability.

We maintain an environment free from bias, prejudice, or stereotype. Everyone associated with the organisation has a personal responsibility to foster a positive, equal opportunities environment.

3.4. Recruitment, Induction and Training

Recruitment Procedure

Interested candidates must first complete our official Volunteer Application Form. This is followed by an interview, conducted jointly by the Volunteer Coordinator and the relevant member of staff, to discuss the role requirements and candidate fit. Upon successful completion of the interview, we will proceed with the necessary vetting checks, including reference verification and identification confirmation. For any roles involving children or vulnerable adults, a satisfactory Background Check (such as a DBS check) is mandatory, ensuring our Safeguarding policy is met.

Selected candidates will complete a New Volunteer Form to provide essential administrative details, including emergency contact information, details of any necessary medical or disability support, and responses to diversity and inclusion questions for monitoring purposes. All collected data will be securely stored on Beacon in strict accordance with our Data Protection Policy.

Induction and Training

All new volunteers will participate in a comprehensive Induction Program, which includes:

- An introduction and tour of Gilbert White's House and Garden.
- A formal review of the Volunteer Handbook.
- The signing of the Volunteer Agreement.

Mandatory training will be provided in the following essential areas:

- **Operational Safety:** Fire and Safety, and General Health and Safety.
- **Compliance:** Safeguarding, Data Protection, and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Policy.
- **Equipment Use:** Radio use (where applicable to the role).

In addition, the relevant member of staff will conduct a specific role-based induction and training session to address individual duties and ensure the volunteer is fully competent to carry out their role safely and effectively.

4. Volunteer Responsibilities

Volunteers are vital to the success of Gilbert White's House & Garden and are expected to uphold the following standards:

- **Volunteer Agreement:** Carefully read the volunteer handbook and agreement, and accordingly, whilst engaged in volunteer activities, follow the rules and regulations of the charity.
- **Commitment to Training:** To attend and satisfactorily complete induction and role-specific training before commencing their duties.
- **Tasks of the Role:** To follow the specific responsibilities and tasks as outlined in the role description and to follow the ongoing instructions of the member of staff responsible.
- **Reliability & Punctuality:** To adhere to the mutually agreed-upon hours and frequency of attendance with the member of staff responsible and communicate planned or unplanned absence promptly.
- **Communication:** To proactively communicate any concerns or discomfort with their role to the Volunteer Coordinator so that necessary support or adjustments can be implemented.

- **Recording of volunteer hours:** To accurately log all hours worked by signing in and out each day using the established logbook for record-keeping purposes.

- **Adherence to charity policies:** All volunteers will, in their induction, be introduced to key policy areas with which they must adhere, including health & safety, safeguarding, data protection, and equality & diversity.

4.1. Volunteer Agreement

Upon joining, each volunteer will be asked to sign a Volunteer Agreement. This is a non-contractual document that formalises the expectations on both sides and provides clarity on the volunteer's role, but it is not a legally binding contract of employment.

Purpose and Scope of the Agreement

1. **Mutual Acceptance**: By signing, the volunteer acknowledges that they have read, understood, and agreed to abide by the principles and procedures outlined in this Volunteer Policy and the Volunteer Handbook.

2. **Trial Period**: The agreement will incorporate a mutual trial period (we recommend three months) during which either the volunteer or Gilbert White's House & Garden may terminate the relationship without formal procedure, should the role prove unsuitable for either party.

4.2. Volunteer Handbook

This is an accessible document that volunteers can refer to at any time. It provides a detailed reference tool for active volunteers on useful information that they will need to adhere to, having been created from Volunteer policies. Volunteers will find details on roles, expenses, insurance, health and safety, team structure, and contacts.

4.3. Volunteer Recognition and Support

- **Value Statement:** The organisation is committed to celebrating the essential contribution of its volunteers.

- **Recognition:** We will acknowledge volunteer service through methods such as social events, volunteer thank-you days, or annual awards.

- **Benefits:** Volunteers may receive non-monetary benefits as outlined in the volunteer handbook; these may change through time.

4.4. Safeguarding

Gilbert White’s House & Garden is committed to protecting all individuals involved in our work, particularly children and vulnerable adults, from harm, abuse, or neglect.

Volunteer Policy

Volunteer Compliance and Principles

- **Mandatory Training:** All volunteers will receive mandatory safeguarding awareness training as part of their induction and regular refresher training throughout their service.
- **Compliance:** Volunteers are required to always comply with the organisation's full Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct.
- **DBS Checks:** A satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check is mandatory for any volunteer role that involves regulated activity with children or vulnerable adults, or any role that requires unsupervised access to these groups.

Reporting Procedures

- **Duty to Report:** All volunteers have a **duty of care** and a professional obligation to report any concerns, allegations, or disclosures related to the safety or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult immediately.
- **Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO):** Concerns must be reported immediately to the Volunteer Coordinator or directly to the **Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) – Fiona Oakley, our Learning Programmes Manager,** whose contact details are provided in the Volunteer Handbook.
- **Confidentiality:** Volunteers must not investigate concerns themselves, promise confidentiality to the person making the disclosure (as the matter must be escalated), or discuss the issue with anyone other than the DSO.

Working with Vulnerable Individuals

The organisation ensures volunteers are not placed in situations beyond their training or role remit:

- Volunteers will **not** be asked to engage in one-on-one activities with children or vulnerable adults unless specifically authorised and covered by the appropriate DBS clearance and training.
- Any activities involving these groups will be undertaken within the framework of the full Safeguarding Policy, which includes clear guidance on supervision and acceptable contact.

5. Insurance and Expenses

5.1. Insurance

The approved activities of all volunteers are covered under the organisation's Public Liability and Employer's Liability Insurance policies for Gilbert White's House & Garden.

5.2. Expenses

The organisation is committed to ensuring that volunteers are not financially disadvantaged by their service. This policy outlines the types of necessary expenditures that may be reimbursed and the required procedures.

General Rule for Reimbursement

All requests for expense reimbursement must be pre-approved and accompanied by original receipts. Only necessary and reasonable expenditures directly related to authorised volunteer duties will be considered.

Travel and Mileage Policy

- **Commuting:** Mileage for regular commuting, travel to and from the volunteer's Gilbert White's House & Gardens, is not reimbursed.
- **Exceptional Circumstances:** Reimbursement for travel (including mileage) will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where a volunteer is required to travel a significant distance away from the museum for a specific, pre-approved duty.
    - **Volunteer Vehicle Insurance:** If a volunteer uses their personal vehicle for an exceptional, pre-approved duty (i.e., not commuting), they must ensure that their personal motor insurance policy covers business use or volunteering duties, as the organisation's insurance may not cover damage to the volunteer's personal vehicle.
    - **Pre-Authorisation:** Any exceptional travel requiring reimbursement must be approved in advance by the General Manager.

Claim Procedure

To request reimbursement for authorised expenses:

1. Obtain and complete the official Volunteer Expense Claim Form.
2. Attach all original, itemised receipts and proof of pre-authorisation.
3. Submit the complete form to the relevant Departmental Manager within 30 days of the expense being incurred.

6. Problem-Solving Procedure

The process is generally three stages, moving from informal discussion to a formal review. Please note that all complaints are handled with strict confidentiality.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

- **Initiation:** The concern should be raised verbally with the volunteer's department lead or, if the complaint is about the supervisor, referred immediately to the General Manager.
- **Action:** The supervisor will meet with the volunteer **within one week** to aim to resolve the issue through discussion, mediation, or by offering additional support/training.

Stage 2: Formal Investigation

- **Written Complaint:** If unresolved, the complainant must submit the concern in writing to the General Manager **within 1 month** of the incident or of the failure of the informal stage.
- **Investigation:** An independent member of the staff team will be assigned to investigate, interviewing relevant parties and reviewing evidence.
- **Formal Response:** A formal written response, detailing the findings and any action to be taken, will be issued **within 1 month** of the written complaint being acknowledged.

Stage 3: Final Appeal/Review

- **Appeal Request:** If dissatisfied, the complainant may appeal in writing to the Chair of the Board, explaining their reasons, **within 2 weeks** of receiving the formal decision.
- Final Decision: The Chair will review the process and issue a final written decision within 2 weeks. This decision concludes the internal procedure.

Serious Misconduct

In cases of serious misconduct, the informal stage will be bypassed, and the volunteer may be immediately suspended while an urgent investigation is carried out.

7. Termination of Service

Volunteer service is a mutually beneficial arrangement, and either the volunteer or Gilbert White's House & Garden may terminate the relationship at any time.

- If a volunteer wishes to resign, they should notify their supervisor or the Volunteer Coordinator.
- Termination by the organisation may occur for various reasons, including, but not limited to, a significant breach of policy (e.g., confidentiality, safety), unsatisfactory performance, or changes in organisational need.
- Except in cases of immediate termination for serious misconduct, the organisation will generally first attempt to address concerns through a documented discussion and, if necessary, a period of coaching or corrective action.
- All organisation property (e.g., identification badges, keys, manuals) must be returned to the supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator immediately upon the conclusion of service.