



MINISTRY OF STORIES

Volunteer Policy

Aims of the policy

This policy is designed to lay out the guidelines and principles of volunteer involvement with Ministry of Stories (MoS).

As well as covering the basics like expenses, health and safety and volunteer training, it also addresses our expectations of volunteers and what they can expect from us

We aim to regularly update this policy, consult volunteers about it and review it with them to ensure that it remains relevant and fit for purpose.

Why volunteers are important to us

Volunteers are not just a part of our work at Ministry of Stories. We know without them, work would be impossible! A fundamental principle is that Ministry of Stories provides small group mentoring and support with writing that is rarely possible elsewhere. It is only through people giving their time and donating their skills, experience and time for free that we can provide this. In return, we want our volunteers to gain as much as possible from their involvement with our charity. Whether in terms of developing their own capabilities, challenging themselves in different ways or broadening their social network.

Different ways to volunteer for us

Being trained up as a **writing mentor** to support our weekly community writing labs and schools programme is a popular way of volunteering for us.

As part of our workshop programme there are also **specific skilled roles** related to our one off workshops, including Storymaking, Comic Books, Rebel Girls and Gothic

Fiction for visiting primary and secondary school classes: illustrator, publisher and the all-important and mysterious figure of The Chief! Full training is provided.

Hoxton Street Monster Supplies Shopkeepers

We also always need volunteers to help run our fantastical shop, [Hoxton Street Monster Supplies](#). You can volunteer to be a Shopkeeper for any of the weekday sessions Thursday and Friday 12.45-5.15pm or on Saturdays 10.45-2pm / 2pm-5.15. Full training is provided.

Governance

We are a charity and therefore our **board of trustees** also give their time to us voluntarily.

We have clear distinctions between the roles that volunteers play in the organisation and those of paid staff. However, our aim is to approach the treatment of both staff and volunteers similarly - respectfully and equitably.

How we recruit volunteers

Our aim is to recruit our volunteers from as wide a range of backgrounds and experience as possible. We want our pool of volunteers to be reflective of and as diverse as our local neighbourhood and the young people that we work with. To this end, we will advertise volunteer opportunities as widely as possible, ensure that the material that we use to publish these opportunities. We will prioritise making personal contacts, developing partnerships and going to speak about our work to organisations and agencies or through the local media that can help us broaden the range of volunteers involved with Ministry of Stories.

We encourage all volunteers to register via the website rather than other forms of contact as this is the most simple way for us to receive your registrations. If, however, a volunteer has limited or no access to the internet, we can organise recruitment, training and registration for workshops by phone or in person. This can be done by our Volunteer Coordinator.

Once registered, all volunteers will then be invited to the next available group training session – usually on a Friday or occasionally a Saturday, where they are introduced to our charity, how we work with young people and guidelines about how we safeguard their welfare. This is a full day session, as there's a lot to cover, but it's a lot of fun, sparks discussion and is a great way to meet our staff and other new volunteers.

DBS Checks and Safeguarding

In line with our Safeguarding Policy, we apply for an Enhanced DBS (Disclosure and

Barring Service) check for each volunteer.

If a volunteer has any concerns or questions about the DBS checking process, they can ask our Designated Responsible Person for Safeguarding for a confidential discussion about it. If they wish, volunteers can choose to inform MoS beforehand of any information that might be revealed by the check. This information will be kept confidential. In the case of a check revealing that a volunteer has a criminal record, it will be at the discretion of the Ministry of Stories senior management team, whether this makes the person concerned unsuitable to volunteer. We will use the guidelines provided by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act to make this decision.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/216089/rehabilitation-offenders.pdf

What volunteers can expect from us and what we expect from volunteers

- We will provide a full induction and training for the volunteer; a volunteer handbook; an introduction to the layout of the building; the staff team, including key contacts and our Health and Safety policy.
- After a volunteer has been trained and inducted, our ears are always open. Our volunteers are actively encouraged to ask questions or register any concerns with us about their volunteering or our charity in general .
- We expect volunteers to be reliable - to show up when they say they will, in good time, ready, appropriately dressed and entirely present (no mobile phones in pockets!) for their session. We think it's better not to sign up at all if there is any likelihood of a volunteer not being able to attend, of being late or having to leave early. If someone consistently breaks these guidelines, we reserve the right to end their volunteering relationship.

We need to discuss how best to structure overall performance management

- We take our volunteers' development seriously, and invite every new volunteer, on completing their first 6 shifts, to a one to one conversation with one of our team to discuss how they're getting along. Volunteers are also encouraged to attend one or more of our regular training 'top up' session, in which they can discuss concerns, share best practice, develop their skills and ask any questions they might have. We also encourage them to use their Learning Journal to support their learning after each session. This can be found in our Volunteer Handbook, or available to download from our website in our Tips and Resources section.
- In return for a volunteer's contribution, we'll provide great opportunities and events that are creative, fun and sometimes a bit out of the ordinary by way of saying thank you for their contribution to our work. We run these around every three months, on top of

extra fun on special occasions, including National Writing Day.

- Volunteers will be given clear and specific roles within Ministry of Stories and will not be expected to take part in any training which is not relevant to this role.
- We are committed to the personal and continued professional development of volunteers. We strongly encourage volunteers to contribute to post-session feedback (briefs and debriefs) and any evaluation sessions as appropriate to their role, and are happy to discuss how volunteers might take on different responsibilities or take on new challenges as the work of our charity develops.
- Where possible, we will offer optional specialised training for volunteers wanting to develop specific further skills and/ or to increase their level of responsibility in workshops. Having completed 6 mentoring sessions and completed the learning journal in our Volunteer Handbook, a volunteer can become a specialised volunteer and train to become a volunteer workshop leader. Volunteer workshop leaders are only used in relation to specific workshops and they are always supervised by a member of staff.
- Our priority is providing the highest quality experience for young people and customers of Hoxton Street Monster Supplies. If a volunteer's performance is not at the level we require, even after support, feedback or further training from our staff, we reserve the right to end the volunteer relationship. In cases where a volunteer is judged to not be fulfilling their volunteer role adequately or appropriately, the following process will adhered to:-
 1. A separate feedback session with our workshop leader where areas for improvement are clearly identified and agreed upon. The volunteer is referred back our Volunteer Handbook to help with this improvement.
 2. A second meeting will be held to review the volunteer's progress after an agreed time. Improvements will be recognised and any other further issues resolved.
 3. If these improvements are not apparent by this agreed time, a further session with the workshop leader or Director will be held after which Ministry of Stories can decide either to extend the period in which the volunteer is expected to improve or to finish the volunteer's relationship with our charity.
- If it appears that certain aspects of volunteering for Ministry of Stories are not appropriate for or beneficial to an individual volunteer, we will try to find alternative opportunities for the volunteer to have a role within our charity, although we cannot guarantee this.
- The volunteer has the right to a fair and objective performance management process as outlined elsewhere in this policy.
- We reserve the right to dismiss a volunteer and, if appropriate, take further action if it is established that he or she is in breach of any fundamental part of our volunteer or

other organisational policy or procedures.

- We aim to run a complete evaluation assessment of the overall Ministry of Stories volunteer experience with current volunteers every 2 years and to make improvements in response to their feedback.
- We expect volunteers to wash and clear up after themselves!

Expenses policy

We can only reimburse volunteers for expenses incurred in the course of their volunteering. We cannot play flat rates or lump sums to cover expenses, as these are considered earnings and therefore subject to rules on tax and welfare benefits. We can provide travel expenses when approved in advance. When required due to a budget limitation, we will may need to prioritise specific groups of volunteers (e.g. young volunteers under 25 or those who are not currently working).

Volunteers must always produce receipts as evidence of expenditure. We cannot reimburse expenses without these. Volunteers must complete and present an expenses form with the relevant receipts to receive payment, which must be signed off by an appropriate member of staff. These are available from our Volunteer Coordinator.

Child care

Expenses to cover childcare costs where a volunteer would not otherwise be able to volunteer without them are available on an adhoc basis. These expenses are restricted to volunteers living within 500 metres of Ministry of Stories and will be offered on a case by case basis and agreed with the individual volunteer in advance. If you feel you would qualify, please speak to our Volunteer Coordinator.

Insurance

It is the volunteer's responsibility to look after their personal belongings whilst on site. Damage to or loss of volunteers' personal items can only be covered by Ministry of Stories in exceptional circumstances where their use has been requested to carry out Ministry of Stories business. A copy of MoS Employer's Liability Insurance and Public Liability Insurance is displayed in the 'Chief's Office' of the Ministry of Stories premises at 159 Hoxton Street, London NI 6PJ.

Health and Safety

Health & Safety Policy & Procedures are available for all volunteers to read in the Ministry of Stories office.

Complaints

If a volunteer has a complaint against a member of staff or another volunteer, we do our best to deal with it appropriately and fairly. Though volunteers, unlike staff, do not have a contractual relationship with Ministry of Stories, we aim to approach any complaint in relation to a volunteer seriously. We do not prioritise a staff member's concerns over those of a volunteer or vice versa.

We have a full Complaints Policy and Complaints Form which are available to download from our Policies page on our website for all of our stakeholders.

Disciplinary Procedure

MoS volunteers are required to be aware of the Volunteer Code of Conduct that outlines their rights and responsibilities while taking part in all Ministry of Stories' activities. There are, however, occasions where it may be necessary for us to issue sanctions against volunteers where general procedures are not applicable or relevant. This procedure is outlined below. It should be noted that in any case where laws or sector guidelines have been breached, the issue will be handed over to the appropriate authority.

Behaviour that could warrant disciplinary proceedings by MoS includes (this is not an exclusive or exhaustive list):

- Threats of or actual, physical or verbal abuse against staff, [children, parents, teachers or visitors] or members of the public on our premises
- Damage to or theft of Ministry of Stories property
- Contravening Safeguarding Policy procedures
- Contravening our Health & Safety procedures
- Any other conduct that may be deemed detrimental to the operation, reputation and/or organisation of MoS by the senior management team

Any volunteer who is subject to the above procedure may receive one or more of the sanctions listed below. The Ministry of Stories will hold confidential records of all volunteering disciplinary matters securely for a minimum of two years, depending on deemed severity.

Levels of Sanction

Period of Investigation

Volunteers will be temporarily removed from their volunteering role within the Ministry of Stories. This investigation will take no more than ten working days. During this period, the volunteer will be asked to submit in writing an account of the issue against which a complaint has been made. Our Director or Deputy Director will conduct the investigation unless it is required to be passed to a formal external body. Once the

investigation has been completed, the volunteer may either return to their role or be given reasons why this is not possible.

Level One:

Volunteers who are found to have breached minor elements of Ministry of Stories Policy and Procedures may be given a formal written warning, outlining the breach and advising them of proper procedures. The volunteer will be required to sign the warning, acknowledging that they understand the reason for it and how to avoid such sanctions in the future.

Level Two:

Volunteers who are found to have committed a serious breach of Ministry of Stories Policies and Procedures will be asked to leave their volunteering roles.

Appeal

Volunteers have the right of appeal against any action taken by Ministry of Stories under this disciplinary period and may seek external representation to do so.

Policy last updated July 2020