



Volunteers' Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What sort of charity will I work with?

The Cranfield Trust works with any charity whose primary purpose is to address issues of poverty, disability and social exclusion. We also support 'second tier' charities which provide services to frontline organisations. Although we don't have a limit on the size of charity we work with, we focus our marketing and PR activity on smaller organisations with little ability to access paid support.

As well as charities, we work with other formally constituted non profits addressing our key issues – poverty, disability and social exclusion. These could be social enterprises, housing associations or other non profit groups.

Q: I have no experience of the charity sector – will it be difficult for me to work with a charity?

Our projects are always in areas where commercial sector skills can transfer to the voluntary sector, such as marketing, finance, HR, IT or in general management fields such as strategic and business planning. Although the charity sector has some very specialised functions, Trust projects are geared to bringing commercial sector skills into charities. A Trust Project Manager will prepare a full brief on the project so you will have a clear picture of the task and its objectives. We make it clear to our client organisations that Trust volunteers do not have voluntary sector expertise to offer. Our 20 year track record of bringing commercial sector volunteers into the charity world is very successful – we know that your skills can make a valuable difference to a voluntary organisation.

Q: Will I have to have a CRB check?

In most cases no: you will be working with the managers of the client organisation and will not come into contact with the people using the service. If you are likely to come into contact with children or vulnerable adults, or data relating to them, the client may ask you to undertake a CRB check. Although the Cranfield Trust Project Manager will probably identify this requirement beforehand, the CRB process is the responsibility of the client organisation and not The Cranfield Trust.

Q: How many projects will I be expected to take on?

Joining our volunteer register does not commit you to any level of activity or particular project with the Trust – it just indicates your willingness to be approached by us. We quite understand that work and other commitments take priority and that you may turn down projects. We are driven by demand from client charities – so if you have very unusual skills or live in a very rural area, we may not approach you as often as a volunteer with strategic or business planning skills based in London or Manchester. We make every effort to keep our database up to date with your availability and interest in

taking on projects with the Trust – but very much appreciate hearing from you on how much time you have to give.

Q: How much time does it take?

Projects can take anything from a half day of specialist advice to 12 -15 days of volunteer time spread over 6 - 9 months. Our average length of project is 6 - 8 days over 4 months. Trust Project Managers specify projects and estimate the amount of time involved to reach the objectives. Once a volunteer has agreed to take on a project, he or she will work with the client organisation to prepare a timetable – this will be flexible to accommodate the availability and requirements of both parties. Time is often broken into short meetings with the client, half day sessions and time working independently at home, and is almost never in blocks of solid days' work with the client.

Time input differs from project to project and many volunteers remain in touch with their clients after a project is complete – although there is no obligation at all to do this.

Q: What kind of support can I expect from the Cranfield Trust?

Cranfield Trust staff are there to support your work with your charity client. A Trust Project Manager is assigned to each project, and he or she will prepare a detailed brief for the exercise, giving background on the client, the project, the nature of the task, timetable and deliverables.

Once a charity and volunteer are working together, the Project Manager will stay in regular touch to ensure that everything is going smoothly. If you find that you are unable to complete the project for any reason, the Project Manager will search for another volunteer to take it over, and if you need advice, support and information from the Trust or from other volunteers to help your project, the Project Manager will do their best to find this for you.

We are always happy to hear from volunteers and charities working together and are keen to provide any support we can to ensure a successful outcome for both sides.

Q: Will I be covered by Professional Indemnity Insurance when acting as a Cranfield Trust volunteer?

Yes, the Trust maintains PI cover for all its volunteer activities.

Q: What sort of projects will I be offered?

We match volunteers to projects on the basis of their skills, location and availability. When you join our register we will ask for a copy of your CV plus a completed registration form which holds detailed information on your business skills. We use this information to match you to projects and also try to make sure you are working with a charity close to home or to your place of work.

Projects vary enormously in terms of the areas of work they cover, but we always have strong demand for strategic and business planning, marketing (including marketing plans), HR and IT advice, and financial management support. Our approach is one of sharing skills: we expect Trust volunteers to act as mentors to their client organisations, helping them through a process rather than completing the project independently for them. This builds skills and confidence in the client, and is time effective for volunteers. In some specialist areas, you may be more likely to offer expert advice rather than take on this mentoring approach, but Trust projects tend to be advisory rather than implementation activities.

Q: What happens if I take a project on and find that work commitments prevent me from completing the project?

We quite understand that work commitments take precedence over voluntary activities. The Trust Project Manager responsible for your project will do their best to find an alternative volunteer to take on the project – although we appreciate having as much notice and help in making a successful handover as possible. Sometimes, volunteers are able to complete the project in two phases, either side of a busy work period, but otherwise Project Managers will be able to identify alternative sources of support.

Q: What if when I visit the charity I find that the project is different from the original brief?

We make every effort to prepare a brief which accurately reflects the nature of the project, but it is not unusual for consultancy requirements to undergo some change. Our client organisations tend to be small and subject to considerable change, which can affect project work. If the project has changed substantially and is no longer a good match for you, please discuss this with the Project Manager who will revisit the client to review the position. If there are other changes – for example changes in the charity's situation or structure which affect the project, again, our Project Manager should be able to advise.

Q: Is there any feedback after the project is finished?

We collect feedback from both client and volunteer after the project, and again 9 -12 months after project completion. Our experience is that client organisations provide feedback direct to the volunteer as well as through the Trust, and examples of this are on our website. We are pleased to share feedback from client organisations with their permission and from our own Project Managers.

Q: Can I be reimbursed for out of pocket expenses?

Out of pocket expenses are the responsibility of the client organisation, not the Trust, and should be discussed at the start of a project. We make every effort to match volunteers to client organisations close to where they live or work to keep expenses to a minimum, but do make it clear to our clients that they are expected to cover volunteers' expenses.

Q: Can I recommend a friend or colleague as a Trust volunteer?

We are always delighted to have introductions to potential volunteers. Volunteers need to have excellent management skills at a strategic level, and to be capable of working confidently as an independent consultant in their field of expertise.

HRNet FAQs

Q: How many HRNet questions will I be expected to answer?

HRNet: We don't expect HRNet volunteers to answer a specific number of questions as we know that they are busy professionals and sometimes will not have time to respond. Some of our volunteers are able to answer questions once a week, whilst some are only able to comment two or three times a year. By joining the HRNet panel you are simply indicating your willingness to be approached by us.

Q: What if I am asked an HRNet question I do not know the answer to?

HRNet: If you don't know an answer to an HRNet question you may decline to respond. We don't mind how many times a volunteer declines a question and nor do we expect them to undertake a large amount of research. We would much prefer that a volunteer declined to answer a question than that they supplied an inaccurate answer

Q: Will I be covered by Professional Indemnity Insurance when answering HRNet questions?

HRNet: The Cranfield Trust maintains Professional Indemnity Insurance for all of its volunteers including Project volunteers.

Q: What sort of charities are members of HRNet?

HRNet: Typically our members are small charities who do not have an HR professional but membership of HRNet is open to any registered charity in England and Wales. We also have some charities who are from Scotland but at the moment Scottish charities are not able to post HRNet questions. This is because in some areas of employment practice there are differences between the applicable Scottish and English law. Because our HRNet volunteers have had no training on Scottish employment law, they are unable to identify when UK law or Scots law applies. However, Scottish charities are very welcome to register as a guest with HRNet and can search the HRNet database and receive the HRNet Newsletter.

Q: I have seen a question on the HRNet Newsletter which I can answer, but I have not been approached for a response by HRNet staff. May I give an answer?

HRNet: When a volunteer registers with HRNet we ask them to tell us which areas of employment practice they are able to answer questions on. Each HRNet question is sent out to two or three volunteers according to their subject knowledge. If you see a question on the HRNet Newsletter which you are able to answer but you have not been approached directly, please feel free to submit a response either by e-mail or via the HRNet website.

Q: I have a friend who would like to join the HRNet panel, what do they need to do to register?

HRNet: We are delighted to receive applications to join the HRNet panel from any HRNet professional, whether their experience has been in the private, public or voluntary sectors. Anyone interested in joining should contact Jane Barlow on jane.barlow@cranfieldtrust.org or by telephone on: 01794 830338