

HOW WE OPERATE



The Cranfield Trust offers free consultancy projects to voluntary organisations. The Trust supports charities whose primary purpose is to address issues of poverty, disability or social exclusion. Although we interpret this brief fairly widely, we do not support animal charities, schools, environmental charities, historic buildings or other organisations whose work is not focused on people issues.

Types of Project

The Trust provides support to projects in areas where skills can be transferred between the voluntary and commercial sectors. Our projects tend to fall into several different areas:

- Business or strategic planning
- Marketing
- Human Resources
- IT
- Finance
- Logistics
- Specialist or technical projects

We also cover a wide range of general management projects – for example, facilitating ‘awaydays’ or merger discussions, or mentoring chief executives or senior staff. Please call the Trust office if you are not sure whether a project you have in mind will fit our capability.

A typical project might involve 7-8 days of volunteer time spread over 3-5 months. Occasionally volunteers are able to undertake projects requiring more time, but these are the exceptions to the rule.

Background of Volunteers

Cranfield Trust volunteers are experienced managers from the commercial sector. They usually hold an MBA (Masters of Business Administration) degree or other professional postgraduate qualification (eg Chartered Accountancy) and have several years’ work experience. Most volunteers are in full time employment and are aged from their late 30s onwards. Their background means that they have a very valuable combination of good theoretical knowledge and sound practical experience. They are often in quite senior positions in their organisations.

In general, volunteers do not have experience of working in the voluntary sector and are not familiar with its particular conditions. Because of this, the Trust does not support projects in areas which are specific to the voluntary sector (eg fundraising), only in management fields where it is possible to use or transfer skills from the commercial world. Please be aware of the background of our volunteers when requesting a project from the Trust.

Volunteer’s Role

What our volunteers do not have a lot of is - time! They act as consultants or advisors in situations where they can advise clients how to approach a problem; help to identify the steps and the sequence in which they should be followed; review progress and provide mentoring to those involved in the project process.

Your Commitment

If you have not worked with outside consultants or advisors before, please be aware that you will need to set aside considerable amounts of time to work with a Trust volunteer – the volunteer will be your advisor, rather than taking the project work away from you. Taking on a consultancy project is a commitment of time from you and whichever of your colleagues will be involved and you will need to include this in your plans for the project. As most of our volunteers are employed, they may also ask you to work with them in the evenings or at weekends – we ask you to be as flexible as possible in taking advantage of their donations of time and expertise.

Project Brief

Please prepare a project brief (guidelines are available and project briefs are usually 2-3 sides of A4) describing the project you wish to work on with a volunteer, and giving as much information as possible about the nature of the work, who will be involved, your timescale and what you wish to achieve. Background information on the work of your charity and how you are organised will also be needed. Once the Trust has received your brief, a Project Manager will contact you to ensure the Trust has a good understanding of your requirements. After a final brief is prepared, it will need to be signed off by the person who will be most involved in the project and responsible for it and a Trustee.

Volunteer Matching

Using the brief, the Trust will then search for a suitable volunteer to work with you. Volunteers are matched to projects on the basis of their skills and experience. Care is also taken to find a volunteer as close to the client as possible, to cut down on travel time and expenses. Once a volunteer has been identified, and he or she has indicated a willingness to take on the project, the volunteer and charity will be put in touch to explore the project further (usually through a phone discussion).

Project Monitoring

Once the charity and the volunteer have agreed to work together, the Trust takes a monitoring role, leaving volunteer and client to work on the project, but keeping in touch in case of any problems. Both charity and volunteer are asked to notify the Trust of any problems at any stage – if things go wrong, we would rather know in order to try and put things right. If either charity or volunteer feel that they are not well matched, the Trust will try to find a different volunteer to take on the project.

Cranfield Trust Services are free

The Cranfield Trust provides free consultancy services to its charity clients, and relies on the generosity of its volunteers to function. Trust clients are asked to cover expenses for volunteers, and these should be agreed between client and volunteer at the start of the project.

The Trust discourages volunteers from using contacts made through its service to generate paid income, as this is contrary to the ethos of the Trust. If a Trust volunteer approaches you for paid consultancy, or you wish to offer paid work to the volunteer, please notify the Trust office – you are under no obligation to offer paid work. Any paid engagement between client and Trust volunteer would not be part of the Trust service and would not involve the Trust.

Volunteer Availability

While the Trust makes every effort to place a volunteer for each project accepted, we rely on the goodwill, generosity and availability of our volunteers and therefore cannot guarantee that a volunteer with appropriate skills will be available in 100% of cases. We have a very good placement rate for our projects, but if we are not able to find a volunteer for your project, we will discuss the situation with you and try our best to suggest alternative resources.

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Don't forget, to request a project you must send us :

- Outline Project Brief (information as described in our Guidelines)
- Your annual report and accounts
- Any leaflets or other information which will help us get a good picture of your work