

# Digital Communities Wales

## Library Resources: Recruiting and Supporting Digital Volunteers in Libraries



Libraries in Wales are, putting it quite simply, one of the best places that digital inclusion be promoted and supported. Libraries are accessible to people of all ages and from all walks of life and can be used free of charge. Library staff have a unique opportunity to understand and meet the digital needs of clients and help them to become digitally included. But library staff are often busy and do not have the time available to be able to support clients to meet their digital needs as they would want to.

Recruiting and supporting Digital Volunteers in libraries may be the answer.

Volunteers have many reasons for helping: Giving back to the community, making new friends, developing new skills, or gaining experience as they prepare to enter or re-enter the world of work. But all do it because they care.

Cwmpas and Digital Communities Wales have created this Digital Volunteer Advice leaflet to offer suggestions and support to Libraries in Wales that would like to develop a Digital Volunteers programme for their library service.

### **Practical considerations**

A successful Digital Volunteering programme relies on good forward planning. Here are some of the things that a Library Service might need to consider:

- Who will be involved in the recruitment and support the Digital Volunteers? Do these people have the skills to be able to do this or will they need some support and training?
- Will Digital Volunteers be recompensed for any expenses and is there budget available to accommodate this? Typical expenses may be travel and car parking costs.
- Does a risk assessment need to be carried out before welcoming volunteers on site? Have any potential risks been identified?
- Do existing Library Service or parent organisation insurance policies cover volunteers being on-site?
- Does the Library Service or parent organisation have any existing policies or procedures relating to volunteers or do any new policies and procedures need to be developed?

You may need to speak with colleagues in other departments to find the answer to some of these questions.

Further information: [WCVA Developing a Volunteer Strategy](#) and [NCVO Planning For Volunteers](#)

## Developing a Digital Volunteering Policy

Typically, some of the considerations a Digital Volunteering Policy will cover are:

- Recruitment process
- Roles and responsibilities of volunteers and library staff
- Induction and training process
- Expenses
- Data protection and GDPR
- Supervision and support
- DBS requirements.

A Digital Volunteering Policy might also reflect the Library Service's wider policies on topics such as Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Diversity and Equality, Whistleblowing, etc. Your organisation may already have a volunteering policy.

Information and guidance on writing policies can be found on the [Wales Council for Voluntary Action](#) and [National Council for Voluntary Organisations](#) websites.

### Who are our volunteers and where do we find them?

One of the first considerations when recruiting Digital Volunteers is to ensure there is a clear and simple point of entry. Next, ensure that everyone involved is aware both of Digital Volunteering opportunities and how people can get involved or to whom to direct enquiries.

You need to decide on the application process. Is there an application form to complete? Is it an online application? Who will deal with the application?

You must also respond promptly to volunteering enquiries and applications. Let potential Digital Volunteers know when they can expect a response from you. Whether it is within 24 hours or five working days, be clear about when you will respond and stick to it. If you keep potential volunteers hanging on too long, you may lose them before they start.

It may be helpful to produce an information pack that will provide information on what the Digital Volunteer will be doing, what the time commitment will be, and where they may be placed. Including information on the training and other support they can expect will be useful too.

### Come and join us!

There are a range of methods you can employ to promote your Digital Volunteering opportunities including posters, leaflets, and social media.

One of the ways to find volunteers is by linking with your local CVC to promote the volunteering opportunity or through the [Volunteering Wales](#) website.

Your website should have information on your Digital Volunteering opportunities and a link that potential volunteers can use to enquire or apply.

You may also share the volunteering opportunity through your social media accounts, reaching out to people in your locality who would be keen to volunteer.

But some of your volunteers may be sitting right under your nose. They may be the people that already regularly use your service and are passionate about the importance of the library in your community. They may be retired people, or shift workers, or parents who bring their little ones in to hunt for a new, magical storybooks in children's session. Pop up a poster and see who is interested. You may be surprised.

It is important to affirm that Digital Volunteers don't have to be a computer expert or digital whizz. They may be fairly confident with digital technology, but the most important thing is that they enjoy supporting people of all ages and have patience and good communication skills to provide friendly support.

Further information: [NCVO Recruiting and Welcoming Volunteers](#)

## **Roles and responsibilities of your Digital Volunteers**

Your Digital Volunteers provide an important role in offering digital support to your library users, so it is vital that, from the outset, they are aware of what is and is not being asked of them. So, before recruiting your Digital Volunteers, you need to think about your expectations of them. What will be their role? What tasks will you expect them to perform? Will there be a specific time commitment?

Typical tasks might be:

- Offering advice, encouragement, and support to digital beginners, of all ages
- Helping library users navigate the internet and access websites
- Helping customers to set up email accounts.

But there may be some things that you will want to prohibit, such as:

- Helping library users apply for a loan
- Asking for a library user's password
- Library user's personal details.

## Digital Volunteer Agreements

Before your Digital Volunteer begins, you may decide to use a formal document as a means of recording agreed expectations. This should be a two-way agreement, detailing what is expected both of the volunteer and the Library Service. The agreement is not a contract, but clearly sets out commitments and expectations on both sides so the way forward is clear.

Further information: [WCVA Model Volunteer Agreement](#) and [NCVO Writing a Volunteer Agreement](#)

## Training and support for your volunteers

Another consideration is what training you will offer your Digital Volunteers. Some may be confident with many aspects of digital but will still need some training and support to know their way around the library and how use to library specific software, like BorrowBox, if they are going to help others.

An initial induction session will also need to include things like whether the volunteer is allowed to use staff areas such as toilets and kitchen. We all need to know not to use Margaret's mug! You need to consider what your Digital Volunteer needs to know before they start or before they are permitted to support library users independently.

Each Digital Volunteer will learn their role in different ways. Some may like to shadow a Librarian or other volunteer for the first couple of times, but others will want to get stuck in on day one. Some would like to read about the role while others will want to get hands-on. The important thing is that the induction goes at the volunteer's pace, so they don't feel overwhelmed.

Some of the key things an initial induction period will cover might include:

- The names of colleagues, both staff and other volunteers, and what they do.
- Parking arrangements.
- Signing in and out of the building for safety and security.
- Where to securely leave personal possessions.
- Fire procedures.
- Kitchen and toilets.
- How and when to claim expenses.
- Dealing with a problem or complaint. Who do they go to? What do they do?
- What to do if they feel uncomfortable with any situation.
- Who to contact if you can't make it to a volunteering session.

Further information: [NCVO Running a Volunteer Induction](#)

## Training

The training your Digital Volunteers need will depend on what you expect them to do and the skills they may already bring with them. However, it is important that they are offered and receive training to get the best out of them. This may include training on how to use library specific systems, such as BorrowBox, or how to complete an expenses claim form. The training they need will be specific to their role and your service, so a clear training plan should be set up for them.

Further information: [NCVO Valuing and Developing Volunteers](#)

## Support and supervision

Digital Volunteers give their time freely and want to feel that their efforts are valued and are making a real difference to the lives of the people they support. So, it is also important that you take time to meet regularly with them, maybe once a month, to talk about the successes and challenges of their role. These meetings need not be formal but can be over a cup of coffee and a digestive (other biscuits are available). The important thing is that you talk to your volunteer both to find out how they are getting on and to show them that they are valued as part of the team.

Suggested questions that you could ask:

- How have things gone since we last met?
- What has been a high point since we last met?
- Are there any challenges you have faced?
- Do you have any concerns about anything that has happened?
- Have you identified any training needs?
- How can we support you in your volunteering role?

It is also important that your Digital Volunteers are given feedback on how they are doing in the role and how they are positively contributing to the work of the Library Service.

Further information: [WCVA Model Supervision Guidelines](#) and [NCVO Supporting and Managing Volunteers](#)

Cymunedau  
**Digidol**  
Cymru  
Hyder Digidol,  
Iechyd a Lles

**Digital**  
Communities  
Wales  
Digital Confidence,  
Health and Well-being

Darparwyd gan  
Delivered by

**ewmpas**



Rhaglen  
**Llywodraeth Cymru**  
**Welsh Government**  
Programme

### **More Useful Resources:**

[WCVA Creating a Volunteering Policy](#)

[NCVO Guidance on Managing Volunteers](#)

[WCVA Model Volunteering Policy](#)

[WCVA Model Expenses Policy](#)

[WCVA How to Ensure Volunteer Satisfaction](#)

[SCVO Managing Volunteers](#)