

Freegle Volunteer Support

Freegle has funds it could use to maximise support mechanisms for national and local volunteers for one year.



What is Freegle

Freegle UK enables its 2.5 million users to hand on unwanted items direct to others. Freegle has 400+ autonomous online local groups run by an estimated 1000 volunteers - and 30+ of these volunteers run Freegle nationally on the Board, in working groups and teams. Freegle is entirely organised online in discussion groups.

- The peer-to-peer sharing economy is no longer a new invention, with upcycling now in common parlance and featuring strongly in the media. This should be an opportunity for us, but it feels like we
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- are not keeping relevant or engaging well enough with the public and our volunteers.

Freegle financially runs more-or-less on a shoestring; donations provide a small amount of regular income. A recent £35k award from Microsoft enables us to upgrade our IT, do publicity and invest in volunteers. Other attempts recently to obtain grants have not succeeded, but we are really fortunate to attract dedicated and skilled volunteers to carry out so much work.

Our Volunteers

Local volunteers moderate each group (i.e. check and approve messages) and help users. Freegle nationally provides IT tools to help groups do this. A few local groups also do local publicity, have stalls at local events, put on Give and Take events and liaise with local councils etc. Posters are available to download and business cards and banners are available upon request. Two or three local groups have obtained funding for publicity materials or to run local projects. There is a national social gathering organised once a year (camping) attended by a few national volunteers. National mentors are available to help group volunteers, and mutual support is available on national discussion groups. The Freegle wiki is our handbook and has resources for volunteers.

Freegle is very proud that we offer opportunities for a wide range of people to volunteer, including those with various disabilities or health issues, home circumstances or economic capability.

We'd Like to do Better

- Volunteers are the lifeblood of Freegle, the local group system with local volunteers gives users a connection that a purely national system would not provide
- National volunteers do vital tasks and provide support to local volunteers and users. However we think the system isn't working well enough at the moment and would like to take a fresh look at how to engage and support existing local and central volunteers.
- Volunteering could be a better experience, more worthwhile and satisfying.
- We have the dilemma of needing more central support capacity to support any additional local volunteers, but no successful way of attracting existing local volunteers to fulfill those roles.

Ideas for alternative ways of working are very welcome.

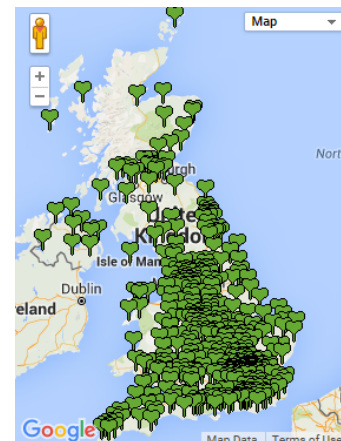
Some Identified Challenges

- Our online environment can lead to isolation and/or work overload.
- Increasing number of groups have depleted or no local volunteers.
- Expanding the role of local volunteers is difficult as emphasis has traditionally been purely on the mechanics of running an online group and not offering other opportunities.
- Autonomy of volunteers makes changes sensitive to implement.
- Budgets are tight.

Scope of Task

- First two months: a strategic review of our volunteer system and suggestions of ways to improve it, with a view to supporting the Board in coordinating the work of national volunteers to deliver a comprehensive package of local support.
- Next ten months: based on agreed recommendations in the review, an action plan put in place and support given for its implementation, assisting in delivering services with guidance and resources as appropriate and available.

We feel this could be done by appointing a part time volunteer coordinator who would complement and empower our existing national and local volunteers.



A volunteer coordinator would need to:

- assimilate the Freegle ethos and current methods of working
- work constructively on a general brief
- be sensitive to existing volunteers
- work well with the Board
- have experience working with volunteers and how other organisations handle volunteers
- work well online and in person
- be aware of financial constraints and work within provided budgets
- work in evenings and weekends
- perhaps be able to travel to help local groups.

Tender Considerations

We would like applications to address the following questions:

- What would you do, how and when?
- Why should we do this, as opposed to spending more money on IT or national publicity?
- In what timescale could you make change?
- How would you liaise with volunteers who might only be around in the evenings or at weekends?
- How will the Board be able to evaluate the effectiveness of your proposals and work?
- How would you cope with the challenges of a large volunteer workforce, all working independently in their own homes?
- How would you prioritise the tasks needed?
- What experience would you bring to the role?

The role would be on a contracted basis, reporting to the Board and working from home. Some face to face meetings will be necessary, especially in the early stages.

Please respond to board@ilovefreegle.org.

Freegle organisation diagram -

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4tr19dmAnNddW5FdDFaVzhCdEU/view?>

Freegle Wiki - <http://wiki.ilovefreegle.org>

