

BOST Volunteer Q&A: Volunteer Handbook Summary

Where is the main office and how do I contact BOST?

Main office: 56 Southwark Bridge Road, SE1 0AS (near Red Cross Garden). Phone: 020 7403 3393. Additional offices: Red Cross Garden, 50 Redcross Way, SE1 1HA and Living Space, 1 Coral Street, SE1 7BE. Volunteering resources: bost.org.uk/volunteering-resources.

Who is the Volunteer Coordinator?

Marta Pascual Argente. Email: volunteer@bost.org.uk, phone: 020 7403 3393 or 07521 026 985.

When are the regular volunteer session times?

Gardening: Mon & Wed 10:00–15:00 (5 hrs); Tue & Thu 10:00–13:00 (3 hrs). Crossbones gardening: Fri 12:00–14:30; Red Cross Garden monthly last Saturday 10:00–12:30. Crossbones wardening shifts: Wed–Fri 12:00–14:00 (book via online calendar). Eco-House Grow Room & Library: 9:30–13:30. Living Space Repair Rangers: Wednesdays (min. 3 hrs).

Where might I volunteer?

BOST manages several SE1 sites, including Red Cross Garden, Waterloo Millennium Green, Living Space, Crossbones Garden, Marlborough Sports Garden, Eco House, Diversity Garden, Christ Church Garden, Mint Street Park, Pattison House Garden, Little Dorrit Park, St George's Churchyard Gardens, Tate Community Garden, and Winchester Palace Garden.

What volunteer roles are available?

Practical gardening, park steering groups, Crossbones wardening, Eco House (Rainbow Library/Grow Room), Living Space maintenance, events support, office help, fundraising, corporate engagement, and trustee roles.

How do I apply? What's the recruitment process?

Complete the Volunteer Application Form → brief chat (in person/phone/Zoom) → reference check → Volunteer Agreement → two trial sessions with induction and relevant safety documents. If you want to change roles, speak to the Volunteer Coordinator.

What happens on my first day?

You'll get a health & safety induction and orientation (site layout, exits, toilets, drinking water, tool/computer use). We may suggest buddying with a long-standing volunteer.

What should I wear?

For gardening/maintenance: old, non-revealing clothing covering arms/legs, closed-toe sturdy shoes (no sandals/flip-flops). Gloves and necessary PPE are provided; steel-toe boots/waders for high-risk tasks. Bring hat/sunscreen for hot weather. Office sessions: casual clothing.

Are breaks and refreshments provided?

Take breaks as needed. Tea/coffee/milk available in BOST and Living Space kitchens; bring a reusable water bottle.

Where are toilets and handwashing facilities?

Toilets at Red Cross Garden office (ask for key) and Living Space. Use hand gel where toilets aren't available. Always wash hands after gardening/DIY/pond work and before eating/smoking.

What are the key health & safety rules?

Read the risk assessments and safety leaflets before your first session. Use tools safely; keep paths clear; don't enter tool stores unless inducted; no children in tool stores. For manual handling, follow HSE guidance (bend knees, straight back). Wear gloves (especially near ponds). Sun safety: hat, sunscreen, water.

What if I find sharps or excrement?

Don't touch. Report immediately to the group leader, who will handle it. Avoid reaching into piles with bare hands, use tools.

What's the guidance on smoking, alcohol, and drugs?

No smoking in BOST buildings; outdoors, please don't smoke around children, while volunteering, or while wearing BOST tabard/T-shirt. No alcohol or illegal drugs while volunteering. Let us know if prescription medication could affect your abilities.

Can I work alone?

Lone working is discouraged. If needed, discuss with your manager. Outdoors, work in pairs when far from the group. Crossbones wardens use a buddy system; shifts are daylight only and must end by sunset.

May I use my mobile phone during sessions?

Take a break and remove your BOST tabard before using your phone; avoid calls/headphones while participating.

What's the policy on infectious illnesses?

Do not attend if unwell. Typical guidance: Diarrhoea/vomiting: return 48 hours after symptoms stop. COVID-19 positive: avoid volunteering for at least 5 days and until well. Flu-like: allow ~5 days from onset before returning. Maintain hand hygiene, use tissues, and inform your leader if you're unable to attend. Tetanus vaccination is recommended for outdoor roles—ask your GP.

What are the emergency procedures and first aid arrangements?

In a fire: Dial 999, alert others, evacuate, don't re-enter. Assembly points: Red Cross Garden: Sundial inside main entrance. Diversity Garden: Library Street. Crossbones: Bike stands on Union Street near Borough High Street. Other sites: follow staff instructions. First aid kits are in tool sheds, Red Cross Garden office, and Living Space; session leaders are first aid trained.

What are the key policies I should know?

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (zero tolerance for discrimination/harassment), Respecting boundaries (professional relationships; no personal phone numbers; don't ask for/lend money or gifts), Confidentiality & Data Protection (see privacy notice; DPO: Charlotte Gilsean), and Social Media & WhatsApp (be mindful, get consent before sharing images; WhatsApp groups are staff-moderated; report issues to staff, not via WhatsApp group).

How much time can I volunteer each week?

Please limit to 16 hours/week and max two sessions/week (subject to space). Tell the Volunteer Coordinator if you plan to change days/frequency.

I'm on benefits: anything I should do?

Speak with your Jobcentre Plus advisor to confirm how volunteering affects your benefits; rules vary by circumstances and can change.

Am I covered by insurance while volunteering?

Yes, BOST's Public Liability and Employer's Liability insurance cover volunteers. Certificates available on request.

Who's responsible for my belongings and bicycle?

You are. BOST cannot accept liability for personal items. Bikes can be locked at Pattison House railings (Red Cross Garden) or Living Space racks, at your own risk.

Are lunch or travel expenses provided?

Meal Deal (sandwich + drink) for 5+ hours volunteering in a day. Limited travel expenses available for volunteers facing financial hardship (ask the Volunteer Coordinator; Volunteer Expenses Policy and Appendix A form).

Can I use the office phone?

Yes, with permission, for urgent personal matters or emergencies only.

What should I do if I'm sick or a session is cancelled?

If you're unwell, please inform your leader/Coordinator (not required every time). For longer absences, let us know if/when you expect to return. Rarely, sessions may be cancelled due to staff illness/extreme weather; we'll notify you in advance where possible. Office: 020 7403 3393.

Do I need a DBS check?

Only if your role is regular and unsupervised with children/vulnerable adults. Most roles do not require a DBS (e.g., gardening, wardening, Repair Rangers, Rainbow Library, Grow Room). Follow safeguarding guidance: be mindful around children; avoid 1:1 situations.

How is volunteer contribution recognised?

BOST celebrates volunteers via National Volunteers Week, Volunteer Celebration & Forum, Christmas Lunch, Southwark Stars Awards, plus workshops and trips for learning and socialising.

Will I need to provide references?

Yes, all BOST volunteers must provide at least one satisfactory reference.