

# Voluntary Sector Placement Scheme for Government Statisticians

## Frequently asked questions

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The Government Statistical Service (GSS) Voluntary Sector Placement Scheme aims to arrange short placements (up to five days) for statistical staff working in government departments to provide analytical support to voluntary sector organisations. This is an excellent opportunity for voluntary sector organisations to benefit from the statistical expertise within the GSS, while also providing valuable development opportunities for GSS staff and helping to build stronger links between the GSS and the sector. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) is working with the GSS to help organise the scheme.

**The closing date for applications is 10 October 2014.**

The information below covers the following frequently asked questions:

### Any other questions?

Then please do get in touch! Email the GSS organising team at [Nsoffice.enquiries@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:Nsoffice.enquiries@statistics.gov.uk) or contact NCVO at [ben.anstis@ncvo.org.uk](mailto:ben.anstis@ncvo.org.uk). Put 'voluntary sector placement scheme' as the email subject.

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# Questions

## **1. Which organisations are eligible to apply?**

The scheme is open to all voluntary sector organisations within a reasonable travel distance from London. It is based on a similar successful scheme run in Scotland, which has seen analysts placed in organisations covering many different sectors including health, poverty, youth services and tourism.

## **2. Why is it only open to organisations in and around London?**

As this is the first time the scheme has been run we are viewing it as a pilot exercise and running it in and around London this year. Depending on the success of this pilot exercise, we will be keen to extend the scheme to other locations in future years.

## **3. How much knowledge do we need to get help? Do I need to have some knowledge of statistics?**

No, you do not need knowledge of statistics but you do need a clear idea of the kind of help you need and why you feel a statistician is likely to have the right skills to help.

## **4. What sorts of things might a government statistician do or help us with?**

There is a range of possibilities. You might have information from your day to day work that needs analysing, or need advice on carrying out or analysing a survey, or need help searching for data about a particular topic/area. More detailed examples and case studies are given in the appendix.

## **5. Will I have to pay anything?**

No, the scheme is free of charge to voluntary sector organisations. You will not have to pay anything; the statistician will be paid by their employer and will be doing this as part of the time they are allowed for voluntary activities.

## **6. Will I have to provide some resource?**

You will need someone from your organisation to spend time explaining what you would like the volunteer statistician to do, giving them some background about the task and the organisation and being available for queries etc. It will be useful if they can have a desk to work at, and access to your IT system but it may be possible to work around this if necessary. You will get most out of the placement if someone is identified to work reasonably closely with the statistician, and that person will benefit too.

## **7. Will expenses be paid?**

No, we are unable to offer expenses to voluntary sector organisations but are not expecting any expenses to be incurred. As the scheme is London-based, we are not anticipating that the statistician will have significant additional travelling expenses, but that will be a matter for their employer.

## **8. Will the volunteer statistician understand what my organisations does / how different voluntary sector organisations are from Government organisations / how we have to manage on a shoestring?**

The statistician will be given some initial briefing about the sector which will address some of these questions. Part of the point of the scheme is for the statisticians to find out more about the sector first-hand – and for you to learn more about how they work in their government department. You may both be surprised by the similarities as well as the differences. The sorts of people who volunteer for the scheme will often have an interest in the sector but will have different levels of knowledge and experience; some may already be involved in the sector whilst others may not be.

## **9. Could the statistician help us understand how we can influence government policy?**

No. The statistician is there to provide the benefit of their statistical expertise and will not be able to advise how to influence policy.

## **10. Do I have to be an NCVO member to apply to take part in the scheme?**

No, you don't need to be a member of NCVO to apply.

## **11. If the government volunteer will be looking at our data, do we need a confidentiality agreement?**

If the volunteer statistician has access only to aggregate data (so individual clients are not identifiable) you do not need them to sign a confidentiality agreement, although you could request it if you wish. If they will have access to identifiable data, then it is good practice to ask them to sign a confidentiality agreement. They would not, of course, pass on any information they had access to but it may help to allay any fears that your clients, volunteers or staff might have (for example, if the volunteer statistician came from DWP and was working with a charity helping people who have been sanctioned by job centres.) If necessary, we can provide a standard confidentiality agreement for you to use.

## **12. How long will the placement be?**

You can specify how much time you need. Volunteers may contribute up to 5 days, although we anticipate some may only be able to contribute 2 or 3 days. It may be possible to arrange for more than one volunteer statistician to be placed in the same organisation, to complete a project that can't be tackled within one volunteer's time allowance.

## **13. Does the time have to be in one block?**

The scheme can be flexible about whether the time is in one block or spread out. Some types of work will be better suited to doing in one block of time whilst others will be better spread out, sometimes with quite big gaps of time in-between. For example, if helping with a survey the statistician might spend 2 days a couple of weeks apart helping with design and set-up, keep in touch and advise with phone calls whilst the data is being collected and then, perhaps after 2-3 months, spend another 2 days a couple of weeks apart helping analyse and report on the survey.

## **14. How do I know that I will get someone with the right skills or knowledge?**

The GSS team running the scheme will match up the applications from volunteer statisticians and voluntary sector organisations so that you get someone as close as possible to what you have asked for. That's why it's important to give some thought to what would help you most before completing the application form and in completing it, to explain what you need in sections 1-3 and tick in section 4 the skills you need (if you know).

## **15. Will every organisation get a volunteer?**

We will only arrange placements where there is a reasonable match between the skills on offer and the requirements of the voluntary sector organisation. The number of placements will depend on the number of people who volunteer, so we may not be able to help every organisation that applies.

## **16. What will happen after I apply?**

After the closing date, we will match the applications from voluntary sector organisations with volunteers who have suitable skills, based on the information you provide in your application. Both parties will be notified who they have been matched with and contact details will be provided. It is then up to you to make contact, discuss the work, arrange timings and any other logistics. We will contact you again after the placement to get feedback.

If we are unable to find a suitable volunteer for your project we will let you know.

## **17. What happens if we find we are not getting the help we expected or things go wrong?**

Initially, any problems should be discussed with the volunteer to ensure that you both have the same understanding about the task and what is expected to be delivered. If the volunteer doesn't feel able to deliver the task as described, discuss this with them to establish what they are able to do for you. If the matter cannot be resolved through discussion with the volunteer then please contact the organising team at the National Statistician's Office or NCVO (see contact details on the front page).

## **18. What happens at the end of the placement?**

You and the statistician will both be asked for feedback on the placement, what went well and not so well and what was achieved as a result. This will allow us to evaluate the scheme as a whole to help us improve it for future years.

## **19. If it goes well, will we be able to carry on getting volunteer help from the statistician?**

That depends. We hope this will become an annual scheme so you and the statistician could both apply next year and request to be matched, if that is what you both want. Sometimes with these sorts of schemes, if a bond has been established, the volunteer statistician continues working with the organisation but in other cases there will be no further contact. It varies with the statistician and the organisation.

## **Appendix – more detailed examples of work that the volunteer may help you with**

You might:

- collect information as part of your day to day work that no-one ever has time to look at in detail; the statistician could take that information and analyse it, to help you understand more about your services/beneficiaries/volunteers
- be thinking about doing a survey of your service users or members or volunteers; the statistician could help you design and conduct a survey of appropriate size and scale, and might also help you analyse it
- want to start collecting some/more information about your main activities but not know how to go about it; the statistician could help you work out what to collect and how, within the resource you have
- want to look for data about a particular topic or area and not know where to start; the statistician could find out what data is available and how to access it, show you how to search yourself in future, and perhaps summarise what the data shows
- have information about your area and want to see how it compares to other areas across the country; the statistician could find out what data is available and how to

access it, and perhaps do some comparisons for you. The Census, for example, provides basic information about people down to very small areas

- want to demonstrate your impact/outcomes but not know where to start; the statistician could help you think about what you achieve and whether you already have any information to demonstrate and quantify those achievements
- have a project where you need some specialist research or statistical advice but cannot afford to buy it; the statistician could provide this 'free'.

## **Case study: Citizen's Advice Scotland**

Citizens Advice Scotland has a client database. Ahead of the support Scottish Government statisticians gave them, analysis of this data was difficult and very time consuming, due to the size and complexity of the data.

The statistician from Scottish Government helped deliver a single file of data ready for analysis. By putting the data in a more analysis-friendly format, the full potential of the data could then be realised. The statistician achieved this in a short space of time, by signing a data access agreement with Citizens Advice Scotland and exploring different ways of creating an analysis dataset. They then used the data in a joint study on repossessions in Scotland.

The statistician also provided advice about how Citizens Advice Scotland could develop its analytical capability to make the most of the research data it holds. This work led to much closer working between Scottish Government and Citizens Advice Scotland so that collectively the two organisations could make more of this research dataset.