

HOUSE STYLE GUIDE

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ROYAL
VOLUNTARY
SERVICE

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO OUR HOUSE STYLE GUIDE.

This guide is intended to help ensure communications to Royal Voluntary Service employees, volunteers and stakeholders are consistent, high quality and support our values.

Much of the guidance in here applies to scripted speeches and videos, as well as written communications, so we hope you'll find it useful.

It's not designed to be too prescriptive. We know language is flexible and ever changing, so we will continue to update the guide in line with your feedback and any common queries or examples that arise.

Finally, the Internal Communications team are always on hand to help when you need us.

Please contact:

internalcomms@royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk



OUR VISION AND VALUES

Our name and style have changed over the years, but what we're about is still the same: inspiring and enabling people to volunteer to meet the critical, social needs of the day.

Today that means supporting vulnerable people and the NHS.


The values we hold dear mean there's real warmth between our employees, volunteers and the people they help that just wouldn't be the same if we were a strictly commercial enterprise.

That friendly, respectful relationship is exactly what we try to capture in the way we speak and in our tone of voice for written communications.

OUR VALUES

A B C **BETTER WHEN SIMPLE**
Understand your impact on volunteers

 **STEP FORWARD**
Inspire and enable volunteers

 **STRONGER TOGETHER**
Recognise people's skills and encourage collaboration amongst volunteers

 **CARE & PROTECT**
Consider volunteers first

 **SPARK BRILLIANCE**
Allow volunteers to be pro-active in their communities

KEY MESSAGES

OUR PROPOSITION:

In every corner of Britain, Royal Voluntary Service mobilises volunteers to support vulnerable people and the NHS. Our volunteers work with healthcare teams and in communities providing practical help and emotional support when people are struggling to cope.

THE SCRIPT:

Royal Voluntary Service is one of the largest volunteering organisations in Britain. We mobilise volunteers to support the NHS and help vulnerable people struggling with their health. Examples of ways our volunteers make a difference include settling patients home after hospital, running exercise classes and lunch clubs or supporting vaccination programmes. All our work promotes better health, social interaction and relieves pressure on the NHS and care systems.

Voluntary service is good for the person being supported, good for the community as a whole and excellent for the volunteer's own well-being.



tone of voice

Our tone of voice recognises that the charity is a modern organisation that invites, inspires and encourages people to join it in its mission.

We should avoid ‘doing things to people’ or using patronising, belittling, needy or passive language and expressions.

Our tone is supported by a new dictionary of terms and expressions: in plain English, jargon free and words that capture the magic of volunteering.

Whilst we want to be consistent in the way we talk and write, it is important that our tone of voice recognises the stakeholder we are talking with. In all cases we will be friendly but if we are communicating with a corporate supporter or commissioner or funder, we can be more formal and reflect the language they use. If it is a conversation with a volunteer or donor then we will ‘dial up’ the inviting element of our tone of voice.

Inviting

We want people to join our cause so we invite them, “Bring your talent, give a lift, raise a smile”. Simple requests to volunteers to give their time and talent willingly. Time and talent that will make someone’s day a little better. Similarly, we will invite people to support our cause, “Help us raise a smile.”

Generous

We believe in the human spirit. We know this country is full of many good people who give their time and skills because they believe in us too. This should show in how we speak about those who give, we’re grateful to them. We are even more animated about their actions, we celebrate these.

Friendly (conversational, plain English)

We talk about our work the way we would talk with friends. Using everyday expressions and easy to understand language. Try to keep it warm, simple and full of excitement for our work. Language for Commissioners can be professional without being jargon-filled.

Active, dynamic:

We are a ‘thoughtful doing’ charity, so our tone and language should be considered, lively and verb-laden. Every day we are thinking, meeting, lifting, chatting, solving, smiling, driving...you get the idea.

Impactful

We demonstrate the difference our volunteers make to the NHS which provides more time to care and show how they improve the lives of people as they age.

IN SUMMARY:

- Be active vs passive – ensure that phrases and messages demonstrate the charity in action.
- Be specific, always give examples / make references to the ‘issue’.
- Use stories and case studies to illustrate your point.
- Never criticise or point the finger of blame. We exist to provide solutions and to inspire people to help.
- Context provides meaning. When you provide real life examples and stories, statements mean more. Tales with truth resonate and have emotional value and impact.

- Peer to peer. There is no hierarchy in our relationships. We see everyone as equal, don't talk down to anyone: colleague, volunteer or client/participant.

WORDS AND PHRASES GUIDANCE

We're called Royal Voluntary Service, not the Royal Voluntary Service.

We don't refer to 'the old', 'aged' or 'elderly people'. Our preferred term is older people because we are positive about older age.

Our volunteers find their work enjoyable and rewarding, they 'give time' to help others rather than 'share time'.

Our teams play an invaluable role in keeping our various operations running, and so we prefer to say 'employees' or 'staff' or 'colleagues' if we are talking about fellow employees. And we describe ourselves as a charity, primarily rather than as an organisation and never as a business.

Rather than 'service users' or 'beneficiaries' we prefer clients (commissioned service), participants (volunteer led) or customers (retail), supporters (fundraising) or simply 'the people we help/support/serve/who support us'. Warmth and professionalism is important to us – many of our volunteers will refer to our customers quite simply by their first name.

We don't have Befriending Services. We have Supporting you at Home (if commissioned) or Community Companions (if volunteer led). And we never describe the relationship between the volunteer and person they visit as 'befriending' either because it doesn't reflect the joy both the volunteer and the person they help get from the relationship. We describe this as companionship or sharing time together

'Meals on Wheels' is no longer a service provided by the charity and should be removed from all materials and correspondence.

When it comes to using 'volunteering' or 'voluntary service' alternate between the two or make a selection based on what is right for the context of your writing.

We're clear about the outcomes we want to achieve and this is reflected in our word choice e.g. our volunteers help people as they age to live happy and healthy lives rather than we 'enrich the lives of older people'. Similarly, we prefer 'we provide practical help and companionship', rather than the more oblique 'we provide practical and emotional support.'

Equally, we want to paint a picture of the issues older people face so refer to specific issues people face or those of the organisations we support e.g. nursing staff that are under pressure | overstretched public services.

Always support a message with a real life example e.g. when you give your time it reduces pressure on NHS staff and improves the experience of patients in hospital. Work by our volunteers has been shown to affect how well patients recover and how successfully they return to their normal lives.

We don't tend to use phrases like 'on-boarding'. At Royal Voluntary Service people have an induction to us when they join.

And in each region or local area we (or our volunteers) run a number of services. We don't have a hub structure.



DICTIONARY

Applying the refreshed tone of voice allows us to alternate the way we describe our services or roles to avoid repetition.

Here are some examples:

Current expression	Alternative
Lunch clubs	A place where people meet for a bite to eat.
Older people	People as they age.
Customers / Clients / Participants / Supporters	People we help who buy from us buy from our shops who take part in activities who support us. These alternatives are even stronger when we are specific, e.g. people who meet to read books play games together (see dictionary).
Enable	Help to make happen.
Freely	Volunteers willingly give their time and talent; because they 'want to', not 'have to'. It's a choice not an obligation.

Below are a few suggested words and expressions to give you a little inspiration:

Our invitation to volunteers:				
Bring	Watch	Share	Play	
Help	Read	Switch	Tell	
Teach	Ask	Build	Restore	
Turn	Open	Light (up)	Sing	
Lift	Narrate	Encourage	Shine	
Offer	Try	Make	Welcome	
Fetch	Allow	Swap	Stand up	
Spark	Knit	Feel	Learn	
Look	Give (it a go)	Come	Care for	
Repair	Sew	Brighten	Inspire	
See	Do	Carry	Recall	
Create	Get	Raise	Sit with	
Join	Imagine	Live		

Volunteer skills:

Reveal	Appear / Disappear	Listen
Provide access	Knit	Gift
Multiply	Place / replace	Carry
Surprise	Sew	Energise
Make fun	Cook	Pick up
Make time	Reduce	Listen
Entertain	Juggle	Join in
Teach	Illuminate / Light up	Share
Move	Converse	Care
Untie	Make it sing	Encourage
Contrast	Reflect	
Play	Bring something	

Outcomes for the people we support:

Moments	Joy	Informed	Treasured
Positive / positivity	Presence	Feel good	I matter
Resilient / resilience	Possibility	Team	Significant
Memories	Lifted spirits	Supported	Recognised
Healthy	Moved	Important	Saved
Company	Hope	Sheltered	Meaningful
Laughter	Uplifted	Safe	Remembered
Rejuvenate(d)	Boosted	Secure	Freedom
Belief	Friendship	Warm	Confident
Amazed	Compassion	Worthwhile	Surprised
Content	Shared	Confident	Clear / clarity
Alongside	Not afraid	Seen & Heard	Nurtured
Thrilled	Belonging	Belong(ing)	Improved wellbeing.
Loved	Dialogue	Happy	
Touched	More	Delighted	
Singing	Companion	Valued	

HOUSE STYLE GUIDE

Accent	We use café rather than cafe.
Acronyms	Always write acronyms in full unless there is no opportunity for misunderstanding (such as with the BBC). Royal Voluntary Service should be written in full at all times and not abbreviated to RVS.
Adviser	Not 'advisor' (However 'advisory' is correct)
Affect / effect	The verb 'to affect' means 'to have an influence on'; 'to effect' means 'to cause, accomplish': <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'It affects me badly'• 'It has a bad effect on me'
American vs British style	Use 's' rather than 'z' (e.g. organise not organize).
Apostrophes	<p>1. Apostrophes indicate ownership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'The organisation's aims'• 'The children's play area' <p>There are some less obvious examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Three weeks' notice' <p>When something is plural <i>and</i> possessive, the apostrophe comes after the 's', for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Our customers' data' (The data belonging to many customers)• 'The customer's data' (Data belonging to a single customer) <p>2. Apostrophes indicate missing letters or contractions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Do not' becomes 'don't'• 'We will' becomes 'we'll' <p>Apostrophes are not needed for plural forms: 'Our volunteers have told us...'</p>
Capitalisation	We prefer to capitalise job titles. Use capital T for our Trustees, lower case for trustees generally (as in other people's trustees) We also give capital letters to the names of some of our services, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Home from Hospital / Community Companions But otherwise please use them sparingly, unless it's to start a sentence.

Colons	<p>Most commonly used before a list or example. Colons are also used before an explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘I had a terrible Christmas: the boiler broke down.’ <p>Contractions such as ‘we’ll’ (we will), ‘they’ve’ (they have) are OK and fit with our conversational tone, as long as they are not overused.</p>
Dates	Our preferred date style is 25 December or 25 December 2020.
Ellipsis	<p>Usually reserved for informal/conversational communications such as blogs, to indicate train of thought:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Until next time...’ <p>Or used more formally to indicate missing words. In either case, three dots are required.</p>
Exclamation marks	Please use sparingly and only in reported speech or first-person messages, not articles.
Fewer/less	Use ‘fewer’ when you can count something, (e.g. ‘fewer customers’) and ‘less’ when you can’t (e.g. ‘less red tape’).
Focused/Focusing	With a single ‘s’, not ‘focussed’ (which is preferred in America).
Honours (CBE, OBE and MBE)	Include titles on formal pieces of communication and for quotes e.g. Catherine Johnstone CBE or Dame Patricia Routledge DBE.
Hyphens	Don’t use a hyphen if there is an option (e.g. wellbeing and coordinate rather than well-being and co-ordinate) but use where necessary e.g. chair-based.
Numbers	One to nine should be written in words; 10 and up in figures, e.g. 11 – 100. But if there are lots of figures in a paragraph, use all figures instead.
Reported speech	<p>When including quotations, use double quotation marks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer Anne Jones said, “Every day is different when working for the Royal Voluntary Service.” <p>When including a quote within a quote, use single quotation marks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “They’ll never call us ‘the charity’ again.” <p>Quotations should be preceded by a comma unless the sentence flows better without one, as below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer Anne Jones says that working for the charity is “different every day.”

<p>Reported speech (continued)</p>	<p>When recording large blocks of speech, a quotation mark should be used at the start of each quoted paragraph. Only one closing quotation mark is needed to indicate speech has finished (i.e. not at the end of each paragraph)</p>
<p>Singular and plural</p>	<p>Collective nouns – companies, governments – should be treated as singular. There are a couple of exceptions:</p> <p>1) Family, couple or pair, where using the singular can sound odd:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘The family has had a very difficult time. It has had to cope with...’ <p>Versus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘The family have had a very difficult time. They have had to cope with...’ <p>2) Where you are talking about a team of people and the singular sounds odd or detracts from the personal message:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘The HR team is inviting you to join it for tea and cakes.’ • ‘The HR team are inviting you to join them for tea and cakes.’ <p>The important thing is to be consistent and avoid switching between singular and plural. In many cases, you can avoid the issue by rewording the sentence.</p> <p>Royal Voluntary Service should be referred to in the singular i.e. Royal Voluntary Service is...</p>
<p>Semi colons</p>	<p>Semi colons help link two or more complete sentences where the second builds upon, or helps make sense of, the first:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I have an hour spare; I’d be happy to help out with the Home from Hospital service.” <p>They also help to order more detailed lists where a comma is out of its depth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘There were four departments: HR; Finance; Risk, Audit and Compliance; and Marketing.’
<p>Spacing</p>	<p>We use one space between sentences, not two.</p>
<p>Stella</p>	<p>Our founder Stella Reading should be referred to as either ‘Stella Reading’, ‘Lady Reading’ or ‘Stella, Lady Reading’ although the latter is sometimes a bit too formal. Always check with Keeper of Heritage if in doubt.</p>
<p>Web addresses</p>	<p>We don’t include the www so just royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk</p>

GLOSSARY

Branch	A club, activity or service that is volunteer led and has a level of independence but still operate within the governance framework of the charity
Commissioned	Services that have been funded
DP	Data protection
First Time for Everything	Free taster activities for older people funded by players of People's Postcode Lottery
Gifting	The monies that the charity gives back to a hospital based on a percentage of profits made in a hospital shop / café
IG	Individual giving (related to fundraising team who manage individual donors)
HLS	The abbreviation for our Home Library service (rather than Books on Wheels service)
Long Service Awards	Medals to recognise volunteers who have given long service
LT	Leadership Team which consists of our Executive Directors and Senior Leaders
Move it or Lose it	This is the name of a branded service and a partner we use in some, but not all cases, so the best descriptor to use is the generic 'a gentle chair-based exercise class'
NHS Volunteer Responders	The NHS Volunteer Responders programme, set up by NHS England and Royal Voluntary Service with GoodSAM, provides flexible, app-based volunteering
Our people	Collective term for our employees and volunteers
On Ward	Services based in hospitals, always written in title case without a hyphen
RGs	Regular giving donors
Retail estate	Refers to all of our retail shops and cafés across Britain

ROST	Retail Operations Support Team
Royal Voluntary Service	We don't use the Royal Voluntary Service or The Royal Voluntary Service. We also don't use RVS. We should always use our full name Royal Voluntary Service externally. Internally, RVS can be used
Volunteer coordinators	Volunteers who set up and run our clubs, groups and activities in the local community
Volunteer led	We use the term 'volunteer led' rather than 'social action'
Virtual Village Hall (VVH)	Sometimes referred to as the VVH, The Virtual Village Hall is an online programme of activities, designed to help people stay physically and mentally active, connected and having fun
Workwear	We use the term workwear not uniforms
Website addresses	No need to include the www in our web address so it should be royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk

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OUR VOLUNTEERS PROVIDE PRACTICAL SUPPORT AND VITAL COMPANIONSHIP TO HELP PEOPLE GET THE BEST OUT OF LIFE.

Catherine Johnstone CBE | Chief Executive



**ROYAL
VOLUNTARY
SERVICE**

royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk

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