



ELECTRA VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK 2025

ELECTRA VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK: INTRODUCTION

Milton Keynes Community Boat (MKCB) Electra needs motivated, able and committed volunteers to fulfil boat crew and shore roles, so that we can provide an exceptional cruise experience for guests. Success depends on getting a good match between volunteers' experience, skills, values, personal qualities and availability, and the requirements of specific roles. How we achieve this is set out in this Handbook. It is updated annually and issued to all volunteers. It covers:

- our volunteering values
- our policies and practices
- the 'volunteer journey' with Electra
- our volunteer agreement.

Currently over 50 volunteers provide the community with over 300 safe and enjoyable cruises each year, in support of the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust. We look forward to welcoming new volunteers on board!

Part 1: Our Volunteering Values

Electra is a social enterprise with clear values that underpin our behaviour as volunteers, working with each other and with customers, guests on board, partners and supporters.

Our values are our 'DNA' and they inform everything we do.

They can be summed up as **Professional ELECTRA**, where the letters stand for Enjoyment, Learning, Enthusiasm, Creativity, Teamwork, Respect, Appreciation.

PROFESSIONAL

We meet high standards of safety, efficiency, and responsiveness. The pride we have in our volunteer-run business is clearly apparent, as is our willingness to review and improve.

Enjoyment

We focus on meeting needs so that our guests find every aspect of their experience consistently enjoyable. Our volunteering roles are satisfying because they let us apply and develop our talents.

Learning

We're committed to training and keen to see each other improve and succeed. We're curious, proactive and can-do. We help our guests discover more about waterways and parks in Milton Keynes.

Enthusiasm

We treat everyone - public, crew, partners and supporters - with a welcoming and easy-going warmth. Our enthusiasm for what we do shines through at all times.

Creativity

We're creative and innovative in the way we run Electra to support the B&MK Waterway Trust. We are good humoured and have fun working with each other, partners, supporters, and the public.

Teamworking

We work together, in boat crew and shore roles, with shared goals and each other's best interests at heart. By collaborating with partners and supporters, we achieve great things for our community.

Respect

We're inclusive in our approach, actively working to ensure that a wide diversity of groups can access cruises and enjoy working with us. We respect the rights of others and listen to their views.

Appreciation

As a volunteer team we value everyone's commitment, effort and achievements. We're grateful for the help that our partners and supporters give us, and for customer bookings and feedback.

Part 2: Volunteering Policies, Practices and Roles

Trust framework

Volunteering with Electra is carried out on behalf of the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust and under the umbrella of the Trust's Volunteer Charter and Volunteer Policies, which can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/BMKPolicies>. These provide the framework for our key practices.

Membership of the Trust is optional. Trust members receive newsletters and invitations to events, and have AGM voting rights. If you are not already a member and would like to join, download the form at <https://www.bmkwaterway.org/join-us/>. As set out in the Volunteer Agreement, volunteers are kept informed on key Trust matters, and volunteers are expected to communicate positively with guests about the work of the Trust.

Key practices

Safety first Safety of volunteers and guests is our top priority. We follow the Trust's Health & Safety policy. We have a full Safety Management System and Risk Assessment for all activities. Training is thorough, professional and regularly updated, and there is 'How To' guidance on implementing all standards and procedures. Most work is undertaken as a team. Lone working requires the consent of a Team Lead; volunteers must let someone in their circle know if they are lone working.

Commitment to diversity We work within the Trust's Equal Opportunities, Diversity and Complaints Policies. Milton Keynes is a diverse and vibrant city, and we want this to be reflected in Electra's volunteers. The more inclusive we are, the better the experience for volunteers and guests alike. Every year we increase our outreach across the community and increase the number of free community cruises.

Data protection We work within the Trust's GDPR policy to ensure that all volunteer and customer data is correctly handled.

Expenses and purchasing Tea/coffee & biscuits are provided for volunteers. Travel expenses can be claimed for authorised reasons set out in our Purchasing System. Most company purchases are made by nominated Operations Management Team volunteers in line with our Purchasing System. Occasionally, volunteers may be asked to make small purchase and submit a Purchase Claim.

Volunteer roles, benefits and time commitments

Volunteering with Electra benefits both Milton Keynes and the individual. The community gets to access a uniquely relaxing and highly rated leisure experience on the city's canal. Electra volunteers say they gain a sense of wellbeing from doing something new, getting out and about, meeting new people, making new friends, and learning new skills. It's a chance to 'give something back' to the community, promote the green economy, gain valuable work experience, and help a new social enterprise to succeed.

Electra volunteers must be age 18 or older. Information on roles is published on our website at www.bmkwaterway.org/mkcommunityboatelectra/. Most roles are ongoing throughout the year:

- Boat Skippers and Cabin Hosts need to be physically active and available to deliver at least 18 half-days in each 35-week season. Crew roster calls are issued six weeks ahead for five seven-week cycles. Crewing can be regular, or undertaken in intensive bursts, to suit the volunteer's availability over the year. If a volunteer is unable to fulfil a rostered session it is their responsibility to identify a replacement volunteer.
- Shore roles in bookings, social media, IT, rostering, marketing and maintenance require a weekly commitment of 1-3 hours, depending on the role (and there are some project and occasional shore role opportunities too). Some roles are undertaken in the Electra Welcome Centre.
- Roles in the volunteer management team require at least half a day in most weeks during the season; a small amount of contract support is provided to assist with administration.

Part 3: The Electra ‘Volunteer Journey’

1. Responding to volunteering opportunities

A Role Brief will be available for each role, so that it is clear what is involved. Roles will be advertised widely through websites, open days, leaflets, and social media, so that we reach as diverse a pool of volunteers as possible. Everyone interested is asked to submit an Expression of Interest (EoI) from the website or contact the Volunteering Lead for more information.

2. Recruitment discussions

Recruitment is a two-step process which allows potential volunteers and the volunteer operations management team the chance to assess whether there is a good match between what the volunteer hopes to gain, and what the organisation requires.

Either party can stop this process at any point, if they feel that there is not a good match. If so, the Volunteering Lead will try to learn why, so that the recruitment process can be improved. For example, perhaps a role brief was not clear enough about the time and skills involved; or the volunteer did not feel in sympathy with Electra’s values.

Step 1: Initial conversation

The Volunteering Lead will hold a first chat with each potential volunteer. This typically covers roles and responsibilities, training, rostering, and time required. Expressions of Interest can be made at any time for shore roles, but the windows for boat crew applications are as follows:

- Skippers are interviewed in September/October, prior to training in January to April.
- Cabin Host are interviewed in January for training in March/April, and in May for training in June/July.

Boat volunteers are encouraged to take up a small shore role too, so that they are involved in the running of Electra as an organisation, not just a boat.

If at the end of Step 1 both parties agree to continue to Step 2, the volunteer’s details are listed on the Electra Volunteer Register and added to e-news and socials mailing lists. If the potential volunteer has not already taken a trip on Electra, they are given a code to book a free trip so that they can experience the service we provide as a guest.

Step 2: Induction

This step provides potential volunteers with an opportunity to find out in much more detail about Electra, the organisation, roles and expectations. It also gives our Team Leads an opportunity to identify any areas of concern. For example, friendly teamwork is essential, but not everyone has the right personality for this. Equally, in most roles there are standards to be met and processes that must be followed, which may not suit someone who likes to do things their own way.

Induction for shore roles will normally take the form of an in-depth conversation with the relevant Team Lead (eg Marketing, Volunteering, Outreach, Bookings, etc) about the role and essential qualities for it. An introduction will be given to any software or processes or contacts for that function. A group briefing may also be held if a small team of volunteers will be working together. Following this, the relevant Team Lead will discuss with the volunteer whether the role seems right for them.

If both parties agree, the Volunteering Lead will be notified and both parties will sign the Volunteering Agreement. Shore volunteers are added to WhatsApp groups and provided with uniform and name badges as needed. Their Team Lead provides initial mentoring in the role.

Induction for boat crew roles (Skipper, Cabin Host) takes the form of an extended session with the Lead Trainers, based around completing a Skills Profile and discussing the qualities needed for success in these roles. When possible, this session takes place on board, with the opportunity for boat handling skills to be demonstrated and discussed.

Following this session, a one-to-one will be held between the potential volunteer and a Lead Trainer, to identify and address any concerns on either side. It is essential that, as part of this, volunteers share in confidence any information about medical, legal or personal issues that might be relevant in considering their suitability for the role. All boat crew must complete a confidential Medical Form.

If both parties agree the role seems right for them, the Volunteering Lead is notified and both parties sign the Volunteering Agreement. Inexperienced Skippers will be asked to undertake Boat Practice sessions with qualified Skippers before proceeding to training.

3. Training and mentoring for boat crew roles

Formal training is mandatory not only for the smooth running of the boat, but also for safety and to ensure compliance with the codes of conduct. Training takes a total of 4 days for Skippers, and 3 days for Cabin Hosts including an external First Aid course. Electra training is a mix of background knowledge delivered in the Welcome Centre or online, and practical experience on the boat. Training is completed in short sessions in small groups. It is always tailored to individual needs.

Training provides an opportunity for the volunteer to explore their chosen role in more depth. Trainers have the opportunity to explore the recruit's background in more depth and gain a greater understanding of their abilities, teamwork and skills such as listening skills and customer focus.

Trainers look out for and discuss any concerns with the volunteer during training. If concerns seem insurmountable, the Lead Trainer may terminate volunteering at this point. Their decision is final.

On successful completion of training, boat crew are awarded Training Certificates, introduced to their Team Leads, provided with uniform and name badges and added to WhatsApp groups.

Mentoring is provided through a buddy system. New crew are rostered alongside experienced crew for their first trip (occasionally more). The Lead Skipper/Lead Cabin Host will have an informal chat with the new volunteer after three further rosterings, to identify and address any issues.

4. Continuing as a volunteer

We hope that after induction, training and mentoring, volunteers will want to continue volunteering for a long while. However, we understand that personal circumstances change over time.

Working as one whole team

We want to work as one whole team, in which every volunteer feels valued and has a voice, and all achievements are celebrated. We recognise that people like to communicate in different ways, and so a varied range of opportunities will be given, to ensure that all voices are heard and all opinions are considered. These opportunities are regularly reviewed. They currently include:

- Quarterly Ahoy newsletter emailed to all volunteers
- Quarterly Electra e-news mailed to all customers, supporters and volunteers
- Half-yearly All Volunteers Meetings to review plans and achievements and share feedback
- A varied monthly social programme
- Informal individual 'annual chats' with Team Leads, who are the first port of call for any concerns
- Opportunities to take part in other canal-based activities with our partners MK Canals
- Annual mandatory refresher training for boat crew

Settling differences

Occasionally differences may arise between volunteers. When such differences arise, our volunteering values will help us to resolve them.

Volunteers are encouraged to raise concerns as they arise, rather than allowing them to develop into a more serious issue. An informal discussion between volunteers can often resolve differences in a friendly and constructive manner. However, the Volunteering Lead can be asked to be involved with a more formal resolution of differences, if the parties think the additional input would be beneficial.

In the event that an issue cannot be resolved informally, our Complaints Procedure will be used. This requires volunteers to put their issue forward confidentially, in writing, to the Volunteering Lead. The complaint should be acknowledged immediately in writing, and a virtual or face-to-face meeting take place within the next week. The Volunteering Lead may need time to investigate the complaint, after which an action plan will be developed and agreed to address the concerns. The Volunteering Lead's decision on complaints is final. All complaints are reviewed by the volunteer Operations Management Team, so that any systemic issues can be considered and rectified.

5. Ending volunteering

When a volunteer leaves they will be asked to return their name badge and any corporate clothing or other items they have been given to use.

When volunteers choose to leave

Over time personal circumstances and interests change, so there is always a time when volunteers wish to step down.

Sometimes volunteers wish to drop out for reasons that can be addressed (for example, by different rostering times over the year, rostering with different team members, improved support, or creating new opportunities). Any volunteer who is thinking of dropping out is asked to talk with the Volunteering Lead first, to see if an action plan can be developed to enable them to continue.

Volunteers who want to step down are asked to give the Volunteering Lead at least one month's written notice. The Volunteering Lead will contact them and listen to their concerns in an informal exit interview. If a volunteer is leaving because they are dissatisfied, the Volunteering Lead will try to identify the reasons, so that such issues can be better managed in future. Feedback is always welcomed and exit interview summaries are reviewed with the Operations Management Team.

Volunteers who choose to leave will be thanked by the Chair for their contribution, with best wishes for the future, and the door left open for them to return should they wish.

When volunteers are asked to leave

Asking a volunteer to leave is likely to feel like a rejection and may have serious implications for the volunteer. This process will never be undertaken lightly. It will be conducted in a sensitive but clear and respectful manner. The decision to ask a volunteer to leave will be taken by the Volunteering Lead, in conjunction with the relevant Team Lead, and confirmed in writing by the Chair, whose decision is final.

Volunteers will never be considered unsuitable on the grounds of race, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, pregnancy/maternity, religion or belief.

However, if a volunteer consistently fails to meet the responsibilities they have signed up to in the Volunteering Agreement, despite support, mentoring and re-training if required, they will be asked to leave. Very rarely there may be circumstances where a volunteer's behaviour requires them to leave immediately, for example contravening the Trust equal opportunities policy, or putting guests or other volunteers in danger. A volunteer who has been asked to leave will not be accepted back.

Part 4: Volunteer Agreement

Responsibilities of the volunteer – the ten things MKCB Electra expects from you

I undertake that as an MKCB Electra volunteer I will:

1. Read the Volunteering Handbook and look at Trust policies in which I am interested.
2. Share in confidence during recruitment and training any personal information about medical, legal or personal issues that might affect a decision as to my suitability for a volunteer role.
3. Comply with all safety requirements and observe all MKCB standards and processes for my role.
4. Behave in accordance with our volunteering values: Professional ELECTRA (where the letters stand for Enjoyment, Learning, Enthusiasm, Creativity, Teamwork, Respect, Appreciation).
5. Complete induction and training activities and read ongoing email and WhatsApp updates.
6. Respond promptly to email or phone messages and maintain confidentiality of guests' details and personal details of other volunteers in line with the Trust's GDPR policy.
7. Dress smartly and appropriately, wear my name badge and uniform, report on time for tasks being undertaken (or arrange cover), and comply with Trust policies.
8. Treat all equipment with care and report any breakages or malfunctions.
9. Communicate positively with guests about the work of the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust, on behalf of which Electra is run.
10. Raise concerns or issues with the relevant Team Lead in a timely manner, so that these can be addressed, and give at least one month's notice of an intention to stop volunteering.

Responsibilities of MKCB – the ten things you can expect from the organisation

The volunteer Operations Management team undertake to:

1. Recruit as diverse a group of volunteers as possible.
2. Carefully match volunteers with roles that match their skills, experience and ambitions.
3. Provide induction for all new volunteers, and comprehensive training, including mentoring, in all relevant aspects of boat management for boat crew.
4. Provide a safe and stimulating environment in which to work, and assurance that relevant regulatory codes are followed, and that suitable insurance is in place.
5. Issue name badges and uniform so that the public can easily recognise Electra volunteers.
6. Arrange equitable opportunities to volunteer, giving as much notice as possible.
7. Organise regular volunteer communication and socials which help everyone to have a better experience and provide a better service.
8. Provide opportunities for volunteers to fulfil their ambitions, including where possible opportunities to learn and develop.
9. Keep volunteers updated about the work of the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust.
10. Provide opportunities for group and individual feedback so that we can improve the service we give to guests on board and the support we give to volunteers.

Volunteer Name: Signature Date

Volunteer Lead: Signature Date