

Volunteering at Ethical Consumer

*The Volunteer Policy of the Ethical Consumer Research Association
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1) Aims and objectives

ECRA exists to promote universal human rights, environmental sustainability and animal welfare by encouraging a wider understanding of the ability of ethical purchasing to address these issues.

To these ends, ECRA produces the bi-monthly Ethical Consumer magazine, Corporate Critic on-line database and Ethiscore.org and research and consultancy services on corporate responsibility and environmental impact issues. ECRA also responds to hundreds of enquiries on ethical consumerism each year, attends meetings and conferences on the subject and presents its case in national and local media.

2) Volunteer staff

ECRA is a voluntary organisation managed by its staff as a not-for-profit workers' co-operative. ECRA's staff is made up of paid staff and volunteers. Volunteers are vital to ECRA's long-term survival as the paid staff are often over-stretched and over-worked. Volunteers can help ease this burden as well as contributing to ECRA's success. Many of the existing paid staff started as volunteers at ECRA and the contributions of volunteers are highly valued.

Space-wise we are limited to the number of volunteers we can take on due to the number of available desks in the office. We recruit on an ongoing basis when a space becomes vacant. There is also a limit to the number of tasks available for volunteers and consequently, we are unable to take on a number of volunteers at one time.

3) Financial 'rewards'

Volunteers receive a travel allowance (within reasonable limits) and £5 per day for lunch.

4) Other 'rewards'

Valuable work experience

The broad range of tasks and experiences open to a volunteer make working at ECRA valuable work experience for a number of careers: environmental consultancy, research, environmental journalism, press work, marketing, information work, graphic design and desk-top publishing, campaigning, database management, personnel, NGO policy making and management. ECRA staff have gone on to jobs at Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and in computer programming and journalism.

Friendly atmosphere

Our offices in Hulme are situated in a complex of flats and like-minded companies - nearby amenities include a theatre and café. Despite its often intense and hard-working atmosphere, ECRA is a friendly and frequently humorous place to work.

5) Skills and experience needed

Working at ECRA is by no means everybody's cup of tea and so we have set up a minimum set of requirements that we ask volunteers to fulfill. This makes it easier for both ECRA and those thinking of volunteering to establish whether we are right for each other.

You will need:

- an interest in and knowledge of a range of the environmental and ethical issues covered by ECRA,
- to be able to take responsibility for tasks and to work well without supervision,
- to have an organised and methodical approach to work,
- to be able to work well within a team and taking part in the day-to-day running of a workers' co-operative.

6) Typical volunteer tasks

Dealing with day-to-day telephone and postal enquiries; writing short news pieces for EC magazine; helping with a section of the main product report (eg environmental impact of computers); helping with administration of magazine mailouts. If there is a particular area of interest, not necessarily on this list, that you would like to develop - please let us know. Volunteers work best when they are interested and motivated in what they are doing!

7) Applying to work as a volunteer

If you are still interested we ask all potential volunteers to fill in an application form, specifically relating your experience and skills to those outlined above. We will then select applicants to come to 'interview' where we will discuss the possibility of your volunteering with us. You should be told within a fortnight whether or not we have a place for you.

8) Equal opportunities

ECRA strives towards equal opportunities for all. The ECRA office is accessible by wheelchair, by lift and through four doors. A full equal opportunities policy is available on request.

Volunteer agreement/contract

What you can expect from us

Training

Induction training: On your first day you will be introduced to all staff and given a rough idea of the layout and organisation of the office.

Ongoing training: This will vary depending on tasks and roles of each volunteer but may involve: one-to-one training, group training, the use of typed instructions and training manuals and attendance of external courses. Training may be undertaken by the volunteer co-ordinator or some other member of staff, depending on the subject.

Support

Volunteer co-ordinator: You will be assigned a member of staff who is responsible for your overall supervision and training and with whom you can discuss any problems or queries.

Work programme: We will work with you to create a task and training programme to ensure that you have a clear idea of the direction and nature of your work at ECRA.

Regular meetings: At certain times, and at least once a week, someone will be available to help or advise if you have any problems. Otherwise, please bring up any problems at our regular morning meeting.

Regular payment of volunteer expenses:

This will be paid by the volunteer co-ordinator either on a weekly or monthly basis. Volunteers are provided with travelling expenses (within reason) and £5 per day allowance for lunch.

What we ask of volunteers

Commitment

- We ask that volunteers make a minimum commitment to ECRA of six months. The amount of time devoted to training up volunteers means that taking people on for shorter periods is usually unfeasible. Obviously, longer commitments mean we can invest more training and responsibility in volunteers.

Punctuality!

- We expect volunteers to commit to working 5 hours per day (or 25-hours per week, if full-time). Usual office hours are 10 - 5pm but these are flexible. We also have 'core hours' when we all try and be in the office, to enable us to hold co-op meetings and communicate with each other. The minimum we ask from volunteers is one day per week.

- We expect volunteers to inform us if they are unable to come in to work for any reason, or if they are running late.

Communication

- We hope that you will let us know at once if anything about the work is making you unhappy.

- In return, you are also expected to be open to constructive dialogue about your work

Both parties retain the right to end the volunteering arrangement at any time if the relationship ceases to be agreeable for either party.