



B1: Availability, contact and communication

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If your group handles money and delivers services and activities, we expect you to meet our additional requirements.

The first is that your group must be available to all people affected by multiple sclerosis (MS) in the area, be easy to contact, regularly communicate with members, and ensure information about MS and MS Society services and activities is available to everyone in your community.

This section covers availability, being easy to contact, communicating with our members, and dealing with press and publicity.



See [B2: Using our brand](#) and [B3: Giving information](#) for support to meet the other aspects of this requirement.

Communication and your role

Your group may choose to recruit one or more volunteers to coordinate your group's communication and awareness raising activities:

- [Administration Volunteer](#)
- [Communications Volunteer](#)



See [C1: Volunteering with us](#) for guidance on recruiting, supporting and recognising your volunteers.

1. Availability

Your MS Society group must be available to all people affected by MS in the area. This means:

- People affected by MS in the area know about your group.
- Your services and activities are accessible to all.

The online tools and written resources on our volunteer website will support you to meet this requirement.

1.1. Promoting your group

Promoting your group effectively means people know you are there for them. Groups with higher profiles also find it easier to recruit volunteers.

We recommend that you use our [Web to Print](#) templates to produce MS Society branded newsletters, posters, invitations and leaflets to publicise the services, activities and opportunities your group offers.

Make sure you always include contact details, locations, dates, and start and finish times.



To request your [Web to Print](#) account, log in or get support, see [Using Web to Print](#) on our volunteer website, or ask the [Supporter Care Team](#) for help.

Services and activities on the Portal

The 'services and activities' tab on the [Portal](#) is our record of all services, activities and events delivered by MS Society groups throughout the UK.

Services and activities listed on the [Portal](#) are automatically published on our website. Maintaining this information on the [Portal](#) enables you to publicise your activities and keep us informed about what your group offers – a requirement for all our groups.

Whenever a person contacts the [MS Helpline](#) or our [Supporter Care Team](#), the information we provide about local services, activities and events will be what is held on the [Portal](#).



To request your [Portal](#) account, log in or get support, see [Using the Portal](#) on our volunteer website or ask the [Supporter Care Team](#) for help.

1.2. Accessible to all

All venues used by your group to deliver services and activities must be physically accessible. Our risk management system includes an [Access Audit Form](#) to enable you to confirm this.



See [A5: Health, safety and wellbeing](#) for more on managing risk.

Accessibility can also mean that a service or activity is available by phone as well as face to face, or that transport is available, if required.

Your [Local Networks Officer](#) (LNO) will support you to set up services and activities that are accessible to all.



For contact details for your LNO, see [Local Networks Team](#) on our volunteer website, or ask the [Supporter Care Team](#) for help.

2. Contact with your group

To meet this requirement, your group must do the following:

- Have agreed contact details with named volunteers responsible for monitoring each contact method.
- Have a named contact and contact details for each service and activity your group provides.

There are several contact methods available to your group – phone, post, email, our website, and social media.

2.1. Phone

People expect to be able to contact your group by phone. We recommend that you purchase a dedicated landline or mobile phone for making and receiving calls on our behalf.



For suggestions on setting up and maintaining a phone service, see [Being Easy To Contact By Phone](#) on our volunteer website, or ask the [Supporter Care Team](#) for help.

2.2. Post

Your group needs a local address listing that individuals and organisations can use to correspond with you. We recommend that you set up a PO Box address for this purpose.

Your PO Box can be set up to forward post to a home address, or you can agree on a named volunteer in an appropriate role to collect it.

Keeping your personal information safe

We strongly recommend that you do not share your personal information – including home addresses, email addresses and phone numbers – anywhere in print, online, or in email communications.

We want you to follow our guidance on setting up PO Boxes and dedicated phone numbers, and using [MS Society email](#).

This ensures your safety and security, both during and after your time volunteering with us. It also makes it easy to transfer responsibility for a contact method if someone is away, or steps down.

2.3. Email

Being easy to contact by email has become an important way to support people affected by MS. It enables people who use screen reader software to access information in a way that suits them.

All volunteers who communicate by email on our behalf must use [MS Society email](#) to do so. Your group has a shared [MS Society email](#) address, and we are rolling out individual email addresses for volunteers who perform certain tasks or hold specific roles.

Using [MS Society email](#) means your email communication looks professional and meets our brand guidelines. It also ensures that information contained within emails is stored securely, as required by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).



To request your individual [MS Society email](#) account, log in or get support, see [Using MS Society Email](#) on our volunteer website, or ask the [Supporter Care Team](#) for help.

MS Support

If your group offers **MS Support**, you have access to a separate 'support@mssociety.org.uk' email address.

Emails to this address must only be dealt with by a volunteer who has completed **Support Volunteer Training**.

- [Lead Support Volunteer](#)
- [Support Volunteer](#)



See [D1: Offering MS Support](#) for our **MS Support** priorities and how we help our groups to offer a local **MS Support** service.

2.4. MS Society website

The MS Society website is a key way for you to promote your services and activities to people who may not already know what's available locally.

To update our website, you need to update the **Portal** – the information you add to the **Portal** about your services and activities is automatically published on the website.

Any changes you make on the **Portal** are updated overnight.

Updating your group contact details

Our **Digital and Content Team** maintains your group contact information on the website. Don't forget to get in touch if you need to change your contact details or make other amendments to your group web page.

Digital and Content Team
webteam@mssociety.org.uk
Tel: 0300 500 8084

2.5. Social media

Social media enables people to interact with each other by both sharing and consuming information over the internet.

Our volunteers and groups use social media to share news stories, images and information about MS and the MS Society. Your **Coordinating Team**

may decide to set up a group account or you may do this via your own personal social media account.

Representing us on social media

Your personal social media account represents us if you identify yourself as an MS Society volunteer anywhere in your biography, posts or comments on others' posts.

Your group account must include your group name and our official social media profile image, and all posts and comments on others' posts must follow our social media rules.

Social media and your role

If you are responsible for maintaining your group social media account, your **Group Coordinator** must ensure you are listed as a [Communications Volunteer](#) on our volunteer database. This is so we know who to contact about your account.

Whenever your group recruits a new volunteer, or an existing volunteer changes role, your **Group Coordinator** must contact the **Supporter Care Team** to update our database.



For more on how the **Supporter Care Team** can help you, see [Supporter Care Team](#) on our volunteer website.

Our social media rules

Whenever you use a group or personal account to represent us on social media, you must follow these rules:

- If you set up a group account, your description, biography or 'about us' section must state that the account is run by a group of MS Society volunteers and that 'Views are our own'.
- When using your personal account, you must add the statement 'Views are my own' at the end of your biography.
- You must not:
 - Post uncorroborated facts, stories or views of the MS Society.
 - Share messages that could be considered as defamation towards the MS Society, any member of staff or volunteer.

- Post content, messages or links that could be considered inappropriate or illegal, including content that might offend someone on the basis of race, religion, age, sex, politics, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, gender or any other characteristic protected by law.
- Engage in or encourage any illegal or criminal activities.
- Post, share or forward spam, junk or phishing scams.
- All content you post must meet our data protection requirements. You must obtain written consent before posting any form of personal information, including images.
- Comments, messages and mentions will need to be monitored and moderated each day. Respond to each interaction (especially negative comments) with sensitivity and care. Escalate any remarks that are threatening, aggressive or rude to our [Digital and Content Team](#).



Download a social media profile image and read our social media guidance at [Using Social Media](#) on the volunteer website, or ask the [Digital and Content Team](#) for help.

Keeping your data safe online

We strongly recommend that you do not share your personal information – including home addresses and phone numbers – anywhere online. This includes on MS Society website pages, group and personal social media accounts, and PDF versions of your newsletters.

Your personal online security is your responsibility.

3. Communicating with our members

As a group that handles money and delivers services and activities, you have access to personal data about MS Society members within the area who have agreed for their details to be shared with you. You can use membership data to write to them, give them news about your group, and invite them to events and activities, by post and email.

3.1. What should we tell people about?

- How to contact your group by post, phone, email and online
- The services, activities and events you offer

- How you fundraise
- Your volunteering opportunities
- News about MS and the MS Society
- Information about local MS and community services



See [A2: Requirements, support, tools and resources](#) for the help available to you.

Disclaimer

Whenever your group signposts people to products, information or services provided by other organisations, such as in a newsletter or email, you must include our [Disclaimer](#):

"Information contained in this publication is for information purposes only, and does not constitute advice or a recommendation. Where we provide information about external organisations or service providers, we are not able to offer any guarantee on the quality or safety of their services or products, or whether they are suitable for an individual's needs. We take no responsibility for any errors or omissions in this information."

Our [Disclaimer](#) is already included on the appropriate [Web to Print](#) templates.

3.2. Advertising and sponsorship

Selling advertising space in a communication is not normally acceptable, but acknowledging a donation is fine, provided you do not show the company logo.



Ask your [Finance Volunteer](#) for guidance, or contact our [Finance Support Team](#) for help.

3.3. Accessing membership data

The [Portal](#) allows volunteers in certain roles to access membership data and download it as an Excel spreadsheet or PDF to print out labels. And because it is updated overnight, [Portal](#) membership data will always be current.

Each time you use the [Portal](#) to download membership data as an Excel spreadsheet or PDF, you will be asked to confirm the reason for the download. You must not use this downloaded data for any other purpose.

You will be prompted to protect the file with a password. You must not share this file password with anyone who is not in an authorised volunteer role.



See [A6: Handling data](#) for your responsibilities when handling personal data, emails, images and stories.

4. Press and publicity

Publicising your activities via local newspapers and radio can help promote understanding of MS, raise the profile of your group, and attract new volunteers.

Press Office

Our **Press Office** is here to ensure we all generate great quality press coverage. You should keep them informed of your publicity activities.

Press Office

pressoffice@mssociety.org.uk

Tel: 0300 500 8084

4.1. Writing press releases

Press releases can be used to tell local media about your group activities. Often a friendly phone call is enough, but a press release can be useful if your chosen media outlet requests one, or you want to contact a lot of different people in a short space of time.

We recommend that you use one of our **Press Release Templates** to ensure all essential details are included before it gets sent out.



Download a **Press Release Template** and read our [Press and Publicity Advice](#) on the volunteer website, or ask the **Press Office** for help.

4.2. When the press contacts you

A journalist may contact you directly if they want to illustrate how national policy or healthcare decisions will impact people locally, or they may require more information on a local event or group activities.

If the call is important or sensitive, or it concerns national, political or research issues, you must contact the [Press Office](#) before responding. Only answer enquiries if you are sure of all the facts and be careful not to respond in a personal capacity – remember that you are representing us with your answer.

Political neutrality

As a national charity, we must not be seen to endorse one political viewpoint, or one political party, over another.



Listen to our podcast on political neutrality at [Representing the MS Society](#) on the volunteer website, or ask the [Press Office](#) for help.

Dealing with negative news

Negative news about MS Society groups is rare, but if you are concerned about a potential negative story, you must not ignore or avoid dealing with it – tell the [Press Office](#) straight away so we can help you prepare a response for if/when the media contacts you.

4.3. Choosing a case study

Illustrating an issue through a personal account from someone with MS (a 'case study') is a popular request from journalists. If you are asked to provide a case study, you must follow these guidelines:

- Make sure the person you ask understands where their story will appear and how many people will see or hear it.
- Only choose someone who is confident at talking about their MS and is happy to give out their name, age and be photographed.
- If you think you might want to use their information again, you must obtain permission in writing using our [Consent Form](#).



Download a [Consent Form](#) on our volunteer website, or ask the [Supporter Care Team](#) to send you a printed copy.

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